# MANHUNT

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JANUARY, 1958

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# MANHUNT

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*The psychiatrist said, "I'm taking a chance—letting you out." Benny thought about that as he watched the girl . . .*

# The Hitchhiker

by
**AL JAMES**

BENNY watched the girl a long time through the dirt streaked window. She stood across the highway in the lengthening shade of a squat elm tree, a suitcase on the dirt beside her, her eyes anxious on the long stretch of road dipping into the distant foothills.

Even from a distance she looked good. Benny spooned sugar into his third cup of coffee, licking his lips as a gust of wind blew her skirt above the trim knees. A real doll.

The youth sitting at the empty counter ran a thin hand down the long hair on the back of his neck.

He chuckled to himself, wiping his chin. They wouldn't let him have any fun at the home. Nothing but big fat mamas wearing stiff white uniforms.

But they said he was cured. They'd let him go. He thought of Doctor Blake. Stiff, formal Doc Blake. "You've been with us four years, Benny," he had said. "I'm taking a chance letting you out. But I think you're worth it."

The youth laughed, a high pitched whine mixed with the hissing of the big coffee urn behind the counter.

"Someting funny, kid?" The counterman said from the end of the scarred slab.

"Naw, nothing funny," Benny said. "Nothing funny at all."

The man in the dirty apron shrugged and went back to picking losers. It was none of his business. A joint on a highway between nowhere gets a lot of queer customers.

Benny fingered a pimple on the end of his nose. Doc Blake had been right letting him go. He was too smart to keep cooped up. A smart kid like himself had no business getting caught in the first place. But this was different now. He was a long way from Phili. Four days of hitching is a lot of miles.

Benny glanced out the window again. The dame was still there. In the fast-descending dusk he could

hardly see her. He wondered why a doll like her had to hitchhike. If he had a car he'd burn off rubber getting stopped.

The bus interrupted his thoughts. It hissed to a stop on the gravel apron just outside the diner and a door swung open. People erupted from the black hole, yawning and staggering a little as they headed for the restaurant.

Benny shuffled to his feet. He hated crowds. Reaching into his pocket he pulled out some change and tossed fifteen cents on the counter. He counted the rest of the money before stuffing it back. A half a buck. Not much. He'd have to get some more soon.

The gravel was rough beneath the worn soles of his shoes as he slowly walked towards the highway. A car spun past, kicking dust into his face. He swore at the retreating taillights.

Benny stood on the edge of the hard concrete, staring at the shadowy figure of the girl. The warmth of the day seeped through his feet.

In sudden decision, he strode across the dark ribbon and approached her. She looked the other way, pretending not to see him. In the light of the diner's neon sign she was even prettier than he'd thought. Long blonde hair hung down the back of the tight fitting sweater.

"Hi!" he said pleasantly.

The girl kept her back to him. He moved around to the other side where he could see her youthful face. "I said hello," he repeated.

"Please don't bother me," the girl said. "I'm waiting for a friend."

Benny grinned crookedly, his eyes searching the emptiness in mock amusement. "Out here?"

The girl pressed her lips together and turned her face away.

"That's no way to be," Benny said. "You don't have to be ashamed you're hitchhiking. Me, I been on the road four days."

"Please go away."

Benny smiled and moved in a little closer. The girl smelled pretty like all girls. It quickened his heart. He felt the palms of his hands sweating up. "You and me could be good friends," he said. "Real good friends."

The girl looked into the youth's inflamed eyes. Her face paled. She picked up her grip and started moving swiftly down the highway.

Benny followed her. He felt the pain in his head now. Dull and throbbing. He could hear the swish of her nylons as the stockings rubbed together somewhere beneath her skirt.

"Don't go down the road," he yelled after her. "You should stay in the light so a car could see to pick you up."

She didn't answer, instead walking faster. Benny ran after her and gripped her by the shoulders. They were real soft.

"Don't!" she cried, trying to twist from his grip.

Benny tightened his fingers on the wool sweater, his eyes searching the highway. It was empty, the diner a lighted spot a block down the road.

The girl had dropped the grip to try and pry his fingers away.

She opened her mouth to scream and he clamped his hand across it.

"You shouldn't do that," he warned. "I just want to be good friends."

With his free hand the youth roamed the struggling girl's body. He'd never felt anything so wonderful.

His head pounding, sweat obscuring his vision, Benny methodically ripped cloth from the white body until he could see it all in the light of the rising moon.

"Now all you gotta do is cooperate," he said, breathing hard. "Then I'll let you go."

He released the hand across her mouth. For a second she stood still, terror in her eyes, then broke for the road. Benny laughed wildly and gave chase.

He caught the screaming girl as she crashed through the underbrush and wrenched her roughly to the damp ground. She struggled to release his hands clamped on her sweaty throat.

"You shouldn't 'a done that," the youth panted. "I told you I didn't mean no harm."

But she didn't. It was a long time before the naked white body became silent. Then Benny released his hands and stood up, staring sadly at the girl. "You shoulda let me," he said. "Then this wouldn't have happened."

He looked around him. The highway was still empty, a black rope splitting the tall woods. The girl's suitcase lay on its side on the white shoulder of the road. He picked it up and tossed it next to the body, then covered the space with dead tree limbs.

With a last look at the spot, Benny started slowly down the concrete. He felt better. The girl had helped some of the aching inside. It was too bad she hadn't understood. He wiped sweat from his long hair and extended his thumb to the twin lights of an oncoming car.

No one stopped. Each car swept by scattering dust into Benny's face, choking his lungs and blinding him. He walked until his feet ached. At last he saw the red glimmer of a car's tail lights parked in the distance. He walked faster until he could make out the dark silhouette sitting on the shoulder.

A man stooped over the rear wheel, punching a hub cap back into place.

"Looks like you had a little trouble," Benny said cheerfully.

The man started, jerking upwards.

"What's the idea sneaking up like that?"

Benny smiled. "I didn't sneak up," he protested. "I just walked."

An animal howled somewhere in the silence of the surrounding woods. The figure next to the car shuddered. "What the hell you doing out here?"

Benny shrugged. "Just walking. Looking for a ride." He looked at the parked car with the flat spare leaning against the trunk. "You give me one?"

The man tossed the rubber in the trunk. "No," he snapped. "Don't believe in picking up hikers." He glanced into the darkness. "Particularly in deserted places like this."

Benny felt the pounding beginning inside his head. He shook it to release the pressure. "That's not nice," he said slowly. "We should all help our friends."

"Go to hell," the man spat, moving away from the youth.

Benny stood still for a second. He didn't remember seeing the jack handle. But when he realized he had it, it was poised high above the head of the man getting into the car.

When the driver saw the steel, it was too late. It smashed his head to strips of flesh and bone in one blow.

Benny watched the figure slide to the ground. He shrugged and pulled the body into the bushes, out of sight of the road. There he took out the wallet and other junk in the man's pockets and transfered it to his own.

He started back to the car and stopped. Ten feet into the woods he saw sand sparkling in the moonlight. He remembered seeing sand like that on his uncle's farm as a kid. He picked up a rock and tossed it. The stone splashed to the ground and rapidly disappeared. Quicksand.

Pleased, Benny wrestled the body to the edge of the bog. With a strong heave he tossed it into the sand. Within minutes there was no sign of the man. He retrieved the bloody jack handle and tossed it after the body.

Inside the car, Benny looked over the papers he'd taken from the owner. The usual identification papers plus over a hundred in cash. The name on the driver's license was Philip Wender.

So now he was Philip Wender, Benny thought. He could get far away from here before ditching the car. No one would ever find the body. It had worked out perfect. He'd proved that they'd locked up the wrong man. Let them find the girl. He'd be far away by that time. Laughing happily to himself, Benny slipped the car into gear.

He eyed the girl across the cup of steaming coffee. She was working alone in the all night diner. Benny licked his lips, thinking. He'd traveled over fifty miles since he'd found the car. It was after midnight. And he was alone with the girl.

She hesitantly stopped in front of him. "Will there be anything else?" she asked.

Benny didn't answer, just shaking his head, a grin spread across his face.

The girl shrugged uncertainly and moved down to the end of the counter.

Benny swung on the stool so he could keep his eye on her. She was a looker. The open necked blouse dipped low beneath the apron. The pounding began in his head.

"You work here all alone all night?" he asked.

The girl didn't answer for a minute, instead swinging her eyes out the window at the empty road and parking area outside. "There are people around," she said unconvincingly.

Benny laughed. "Yeah," he said. "I bet there are." He wiped dripping saliva from his chin. "You're a nice looking girl. Supposing we get together outside?"

The girl swallowed, flushing. "I think maybe you better leave, mister," she said.

Benny laughed again. "Sure," he grinned. "I'll leave soon enough." He moved to the door and locked it. The girl paled, moving away from him.

"Don't be scared," he soothed. "It won't hurt."

The girl screamed. Laughing wildly Benny choked it off with his hand. With the other he ripped the front of her dress away.

The pounding in his head increased. This one had lots of what he wanted.

Swearing in pleasure, Benny reached to touch the girl.

Something exploded in the room. He felt pain sear his shoulder. He grabbed at the nakedness but his hand fell away. His strength was leaving him. More pain smashed at him. He felt himself being propelled by an invisible hand until he smashed against stacks of dishes in the kitchen. He tried to support himself on the big metal tubs. No use. Slowly he slid to the floor.

His eyes clearing he looked up at the tall figures above him. One of them leaned closer. Benny made out the words highway patrol on the shirt sleeve.

The voices were far away.

The girl spoke first, still afraid. "Who . . . who is he?"

"Don't know yet," one of the men said. "But he's had a busy night."

"Yeah," the other voice agreed grimly. "The bum killed a guy named Philip Wender about ten miles the other side of the bus stop. Stole his car and papers and left the body alongside the road in the bushes. Wender's wife had been on a trip. Came back on the bus and was waiting to meet him. She must have gotten in the killer's car before she realized her husband wasn't driving. This nut here raped and killed her. We found the body down the road with a suitcase. That's how we made the identification. There was a picture of Wender in that bag."

The other cop's voice drifted through his rapidly fogging brain. "You're lucky, lady," it said. "One of the boys down at headquarters knew you worked here alone at night. We figured this guy as a sex artist and been keeping an eye on this place."

Doc Blake was wrong, Benny thought. But he'd find out soon enough.

A LAMP SHONE on the corner. The rest of the block was dark and quiet. It appeared deserted, but a man stood in a shadowed doorway, leaned against it, his hands in his pockets, casually smoking a cigarette and watching a window across the street where a shade was drawn.

It was eleven-thirty. At ten to twelve Flynn turned the corner, came down the block, entered the doorway of a tenement. He went upstairs. A minute later a light went on behind the drawn shade which the man in the doorway was watching.

The man waited, kept his eyes on the shade. Occasionally a shadow crossed it. Finally the light went out.

The man in the doorway waited. Five minutes passed, and he glanced at his wristwatch.

Got him, he thought, and he stepped from the doorway, took out his cigarettes, lit one, and went up the block toward the lamppost.

The shade moved where the light had gone out. Flynn stood behind it and watched the man walk up the block. Finally he straightened the shade, turned and stood tense, aware of the danger that threatened him.

Thoughts moved swifter than light through his mind, and he steeled himself, crossed the room toward the door. It seemed far away, withdrawing. Suddenly he became aware of his body, muscles that were tight as coiled springs.

He reached the door, put his hand inside his

by
**HAL ELLSON**

*Flynn needed money—so he bought two hundred dollars for a ten-dollar bill.*

# JUNGLE

jacket, found the gun, gripped it tightly, then released it slowly and opened the door.

He went down the stairs, out the front door and started down the block in the opposite direction the man had taken.

As he turned the corner, he felt some of the tension leave his body. He took a deep breath, walked slower, and the fear which had invaded his mind left him.

But he wasn't safe. The man who'd been watching from the doorway had taken up another station from which to watch, had seen him step from the doorway and move down the block.

He started after Flynn, reached the corner, saw him as he passed under a street lamp midway up the block and followed him to a bar.

Once in the bar, Flynn felt better, but he needed a drink. The bartender came over and grinned.

"How's it going, Joe?"

"All right, Shanley."

"What'll it be?"

"The usual."

Shanley got a bottle and poured.

"Leave it," said Flynn.

Shanley left the bottle on the bar, walked toward another customer, and glanced back at Flynn.

Flynn helped himself to three shots, glanced at himself in the mirror behind the bar, then at the others in the place.

He placed a bill under the empty glass and started for the door. Shanley turned, watched him go. He stepped outside, walked to the corner and passed a man standing in a doorway. A block away he turned into a brightly lit avenue, came to a cabaret, entered it and approached a waiter.

"Where's Helen?" he said.

"I think she's gone already, Joe."

"Any one with her?"

"Not that I know of."

Flynn nodded, turned away and walked out. Halfway down the block, the man who'd been tailing him came alert, started after him.

Helen lived in an apartment close by on a side street. Flynn hurried there, looked up at her window, entered the apartment, rang the bell, waited, and rang again.

There was no response, and he didn't know what to do now. He'd seen a light in her window. Was someone with her?

Angry, he started to leave, turned back and pressed the bell-button again, and held his finger on it.

Suddenly the door behind him opened. His hand went inside his jacket and he whirled around.

A woman's laughter rang in the vestibule. A man came in behind her. She saw Flynn and stopped laughing.

He withdrew his hand from his jacket, and walked to the door. As it closed behind him he heard the woman laughing again. When he stepped outside he thought of her and her escort going upstairs, the two of them entering a room, a light going on, both of them safe.

Safe, he thought, and fear surged within him again. It left him weak. He fought the sensation, tried to get hold of himself.

But he didn't know. That was the trouble. He didn't know who was after him. There was only one certainty—the triggerman would be from out of town, brought in to do the job.

He shivered in the cool night air, walked on, came to a diner, paused, then stepped inside. The warm air of the place struck him. He walked to a stool, sat down, and the counterman came over.

He ordered, turned, saw a policeman at the other end of the diner, collar open and one cheek bulging with food. A young couple sat in a booth. The radio was playing.

The counterman returned with Flynn's coffee. He placed it before him, slid the sugar bowl within reach, a spoon, and finally a napkin.

Flynn picked up the spoon, helped himself to sugar, stirred it in his cup while fragments of song came to him from the radio. The words fused with the idle chatter of the young couple in the booth, Helen's face, and the faceless face of the hired gunman who was searching for him.

The door of the diner opened and the man who'd been trailing him entered. He took a seat near Flynn, asked for coffee. Flynn looked up and turned away when the man raised his eyes.

The counterman began polishing the coffee urn, the policeman picked up his sandwich, the radio continued playing. The man sitting beside Flynn lit a cigarette, and Flynn raised his eyes, looked at the clock behind the counter. It had stopped.

"What's the time?" he asked.

The counterman glanced at his wristwatch. "One-thirty on the dot," he said, and the policeman looked at Flynn.

"How's things, Joe?" the counterman asked. He was still polishing the urn, and his face was reflected from the bright metal.

"Okay," Flynn answered, watching the counterman's reflection and aware at the same time that the man beside him had turned to look at him.

Quiet prevailed in the diner now—except for the radio. The tired commentator was announcing another number.

The policeman wiped his mouth, swung round on his stool. The counterman finished shining the urn, chucked the rag, turned, stood with his legs apart, lit a cigarette, and said to the policeman, "You got the racket, Jack."

"Yeah, that's what you think."

"That's what I know."

"Everybody thinks we have a racket, but pounding a beat is the world's worst job."

"Wrong. This is the worst," said the counterman.

The policeman began to button his coat. "Beat

the pavement for eight hours like I did today and you'll sing another tune. You complain when it's nice and warm in here. Hell, you have people to talk to, and you don't have to hide in a doorway to smoke a cigarette."

Flynn listened and thought of himself. He wished he could be a counterman, the "law," anything but what he was.

Anything, he said to himself, and he raised his cup, finished his coffee, glanced at the stopped clock.

"What's the time now?"

"One-forty. What's the matter, Joe? Got a date?"

Flynn didn't answer. The man beside him was watching.

The policeman stood up, yawned, walked to the door, stopped and said from there, "Take it easy, Phil."

"You, too, Jack."

Staring at the urn, Flynn saw the blue of the policeman's uniform there, saw the door open, the blue disappear, and the door swing back into place.

Now the young couple stood up. They left. The cash register rang, and the tired voice of the commentator came over the radio once more, then a brassy recording.

Flynn glanced at the urn again, turned away and found the man on the next stool staring at him. He looked away, and the man spoke.

"Pardon, but weren't you in the 168th Infantry band?"

Flynn turned, shook his head. "No, I was never in any band."

The man grinned. "I guess you were wondering why I was staring, but you look exactly like a guy I used to know. We were both in the 168th. I'd swear you're the guy."

"Never heard of the 168th," Flynn answered.

He turned away, put a quarter on the counter, got up and walked out. When he reached the corner he looked back at the diner. The man hadn't come out. He went on again, and returned to the apartment where Helen lived.

Once there, he rang the bell. This time the lock ticked. He opened the door and ran up the stairs. Two flights above he stopped on the landing. A peephole opened in a door, then the door itself.

He walked into the apartment, through a foyer. Helen followed him into the room. He looked around it, and she watched him nonchalantly, walked to a table, picked a cigarette from a box, lit it and sat down.

"What's wrong?" she asked casually.

"I called for you before, Helen."

"That's what bothering you?"

He looked at her and his eyes flashed, but he had no time for anger. If someone else had been here, it no longer mattered.

"I need some money," he said.

"Yes?"

"You heard me. I need money."

She smiled. "You know if I had it, I'd give it to you, Joe."

"What do you mean, if you had it? You've got it. Only last week I gave you . . ."

"That's gone, spent already."

Baffled, he stood there, felt she was laughing at him behind her face.

"Sit down, Joe. Want a drink"

"No." He lit a cigarette, looked at the window, then at her.

"What's on your mind, Joe?"

"Nothing."

"I haven't got the money. Honest."

"Tough," he said. "That's tough on me because they're looking for my skin."

"And you want the money to make a break?"

"I said they're after me."

"For what?"

"I held out on a couple of collections."

"And you want to skip town without me?"

"I didn't say that."

"You don't have to say it, Joe."

"I'll send for you later."

"Yes, you will. You'll send for me."

"Okay, then you got other ideas, but let me have the money."

"I can't. I haven't got it. You know that. I can't hold on to money. Anyway, you shouldn't have given it to me if you didn't want me to spend it."

"Okay, you spent it, but you couldn't spend it all, so let's have what's left."

"Don't be silly, Joe. I told you the truth. There's nothing left."

He turned to the window again. She was lying, of course, but there was nothing he could do; he should have known she'd hold out when he needed it.

"Okay, let's forget I asked," he said, and she smiled faintly.

"You're not losing your nerve, are you, Joe?"

"No, but I'm up against the real thing this time. This is the business."

"You never ran out before."

He flushed and whirled around.

"Did you?"

He was about to lunge at her, ready to grab her throat, wipe the smile from her face. Her next words stopped him.

"You'll send for me, Joe?"

"You don't believe me, do you?"

"Don't believe you? Of course I do." She said this with a smile, the inflection in her voice made clear her meaning, and he leaned forward once more, ready to lunge. But he stopped himself.

"All right," he said. "All right, Helen."

She was still watching him and smiling. He looked across the room, and back at her.

"You're not leaving so soon, are you?" she asked.

He opened his mouth to speak and couldn't. Anger drove him toward the door.

"Send for me when you get set," she said after him. "I'll be waiting."

He stopped and came at her, face drawn. She'd turned away, was reaching for a cigarette when the back of his hand caught her full across the face. He struck her twice, and started for the door. When it slammed shut behind him, she was still sitting in the chair with her face in her hands.

He came down the stairs, passed through the lobby, left the building. A man, sitting in the lobby, got up and followed him.

Flynn walked to a restaurant, made a phone call, came out and headed for the el a block away. He took the steps on the run, went through the turnstile and caught a train just coming into the station.

It clattered uptown to the Seventies and he got off again. This was it, a desperate chance, but it had to work, he had to have the money and this was the only way of getting it.

They said they'd wait for him. A brief walk and he reached the house, stopped in front of it and took the money from his pocket. All he had. The last ten.

He felt it carefully, entered the house, mounted the stairs, stopped on the first landing under a dim light, and examined the bill again.

He started up again. There was no light on the second landing. He moved toward a door, knocked twice, waited and pressed his arm against the gun beneath his jacket.

Desperate, he didn't care what happened now, and if the bluff didn't work. . . .

The door opened, and a man in shirtsleeves stood there. Beyond him Flynn saw the others playing cards at a table.

The man stepped aside, and Flynn entered. The door closed behind him. The card game went on.

"I want five hundred," Flynn said to the man in shirtsleeves.

"That's all?"

"That's all I'm buying. I rode the wrong nag today."

The man in shirtsleeves laughed, turned away and went into a back room. He came back with the counterfeit. Flynn handed him the ten-spot.

"What's this?" Shirtsleeves asked, and Flynn froze.

The men at the table looked up. Flynn waited. The trick had failed, and he was ready for anything.

"The price is five dollars a hundred now," Shirtsleeves said.

Flynn felt relieved but weak. His face remained calm.

"What do you mean, five a hundred?"

"That's what I said. This is good stuff. You won't have trouble passing it."

"I'll take two hundred," Flynn said.

Shirtsleeves handed him the money. That was all. Flynn turned and walked out, hurried down the stairs and back to the el.

He ran up the steps and waited in the station lavatory till he heard the train roll in. He came out, boarded the train. Another man, the one who'd been trailing him, stepped in at the last moment.

Back in the room where the card players were, Shirtsleeves held up the ten-dollar bill Flynn had given him, stared at it, then tossed it on the table and said, "Take a look at that."

One of the players picked it up. "Christ, it's a phony."

Everyone laughed but Shirtsleeves. Finally he grinned and said, "It's a real stinker too. A blind man could spot it at ten miles."

The others laughed again, and Shirtsleeves picked up the bill, put a match to it and said, as it took fire, "I wouldn't try to pass this one on my grandmother."

"He took you at your own game, Benny," a player at the table said.

"Yeah, and you know what else? That guy had guts to pull one like that. I give him credit."

Flynn smiled to himself as the rattling el train carried him downtown. Two hundred in almost perfect counterfeit was nestled in his pocket. Easy stuff to pass, he thought.

He began to whistle, stopped when he remembered the man he'd seen in the doorway earlier that evening.

It was best to break away fast, get out of the city, hit for that little farmhouse upstate and hole up there for a while.

But he had to wait for tomorrow. It was too late now to pass the counterfeit. Anyway, he was one jump ahead of them, confident again. He decided to risk it and return to the room, get some clothes and then clear out.

The train was approaching his station now. He took out his cigarettes, started to put one to his mouth when he noticed a man standing on the platform at the far end of the car. Immediately he came alert. No matter that he didn't recognize the man.

The train rolled into the station, braked to a stop. Flynn stood up, went to a door and stepped out to the station platform. At the same moment the other passenger stepped from the opposite door. Flynn hesitated, then started for the stairs. The man took a different flight, descended to the street and entered an all-night restaurant.

Flynn watched him go through the door and started to walk away, still tense, sensing danger.

Time was running out, he'd stretched his luck too far. They were closing in on him. If he returned to his room again, they'd get him this time.

But if they didn't know. If he could throw them

off and return without being seen, he'd be safe at least for tonight.

He started to walk. A taxi swung around the corner, came down the block. He hailed it, jumped in. Three minutes later it dropped him off.

He entered the house, climbed the stairs to his room, shut the door just as a car stopped in front of the house.

A second later he stood at the window, moved the shade, looked down and saw the car. There were four men in it. Three got out. One remained at the wheel, one walked toward the corner, two started for the door of the house. One of them stopped there. The other entered the vestibule.

Flynn couldn't move, didn't know what to do. His mind was a blank, then he thought of the roof, started for the door.

He stepped into the hall, closed the door behind him and was about to lock it when he heard footsteps on the stairway below.

Too late to go back. The room was a trap now. He moved to the stairs, started up the second flight, stopped when the steps creaked under his weight, and pressed against the wall.

The footsteps below came on, reached the landing, stopped, and came on again. A shadowy figure advanced, stopped at the door of the room Flynn had just left.

Flynn held his breath, waited, and heard a jingling of keys. But there was no need of them. When the man on the landing tried the door he found it unlocked.

He turned the knob, pushed open the door, hesitated, then stepped into the room. He closed the door behind him.

Flynn waited. When the man didn't come out, he looked up the stairs and wanted to run. But that wouldn't do. The noise would give him away. Even if he made it to the roof, if he went up quietly . . .

He decided to wait it out. Time passed with torturous slowness. Weakness assailed him, fear numbed his body and mind. Then suddenly he realized that the one who'd entered his room was waiting there for him. This was the way it was to happen.

He knew now and still was afraid to move. He couldn't go down. The only way was up. The creaky stairs frightened him, but he had to chance it. He couldn't wait any longer.

About to move, he stopped himself, froze. A door had opened below. Footsteps sounded on the stairs. A movement alerted Flynn. Then he saw what it was. The door of his room was slowly opening.

For a moment a shadowy face appeared, and the door closed silently. Someone was on the landing now. A shadowy figure came toward Flynn, paused at the foot of the second flight.

Flynn pressed back against the wall, and the shadowy one started climbing, passed him. An odor of whiskey filled the hall. Flynn smelled it, watched the man climb into darkness, heard the steps soften overhead, and a door bang shut.

Weakness assailed him again. His back ached, his legs trembled. It would be easier to give up than take any more of this. Fear held him back, but his nerves were shattered. He felt he was going to shout when the door of his room opened again.

He saw the shadowy face and stood motionless, stifled his breath. Finally he raised his hand, slipped it under his jacket and gripped his gun.

Footsteps sounded on the stairs again. The door down below had opened and closed. Halfway up the stairs, the footsteps ceased. A man called softly.

"Devlin!"

"That you, Web?"

"Yeah, let's go. The punk must have smelled a rat or he'd be here by now."

The shadowy figure came out of the room, went down the stairs, met the other figure. Voices sounded below, then the front door opened.

And it was at that moment that Flynn cracked, and knew he couldn't stand it any longer. They might be going away now, and he might have a few more hours, or maybe even a whole night, but it was just a matter of time—just a little time.

He moved then gun in his hand until he was holding it by the barrel, and then he threw the gun hard down the stairwell. The gun shattered the glass of the front door, and the two men dived into the shadows, their own guns suddenly in their hands.

The men stood there, hunched and uncertain, and then they began to move slowly upstairs as they heard Flynn screaming down at them.

"Up here, you bastards!" Flynn said, his voice a ragged shriek. "I'm up here!"

## *Prepared*

Police in York, Pa., arrested a young boy for shoplifting. In his possession officers found a notebook entitled "Hooking—How to Be a Good Thief." Along with rules on the right way to do wrong, the book included a map showing where he had hidden his loot and a will "in case I'm caught."

# return no more

*The door slammed, and suddenly Connors was scared to death. He hadn't been alone in over twenty years . . .*

**by TALMAGE POWELL**

Connors watched the cheap electric clock on the mantel. It was almost nine o'clock in the morning. He lighted a cigarette. His hands were shaking badly. She would leave at nine o'clock. And he would be alone in the apartment. He hadn't been alone in over twenty years. He hadn't been out of her presence since she'd met him at the prison gates yesterday.

She'd kept up a running chatter all the way on the drive into the city. Telling him about the apartment. Her job.

She'd been crying a little. Twenty years is a long time to wait.

They'd had dinner here in the apartment. They'd gone to bed early and he'd clung to her long after she was asleep.

He awoke at six this morning, the habit of twenty years. Early dawn had etched shadows against the window. He'd lain with his heart hammering, because the window was wrong. The window was huge, empty, opening into the vastness of sky and

earth and buildings and people. There were no bars over the window.

Shivers had crossed his thin, wiry body as he'd lain for an hour and a half waiting for her to wake. At the first peal of the alarm, he'd grabbed the clock and said, "Myrtle! Myrtle, time to get up."

She'd turned sleepily, smiled at him, and put her arms around his thin, corded neck. He'd been revolted by her touch, because it was transitory. She couldn't stay here. By nine o'clock she would be out, gone to her job at the cafe.

Breakfast had nauseated him, but he'd forced himself to eat. She'd wanted him to eat so badly. Her eyes, large and brown, heavy and dewy like the rest of her, had been filled with concern for him.

"You just take it easy today, honey," she'd said, laying her work-roughed, meaty hand on his. "It's all over now. Twenty years of waiting. You are home."

"Yeah," he'd said. "Home . . . Myrt, it was good of you to wait. Not many women would have."

"Well," she laughed, "maybe nobody else would have me, big and blowsy like I am, with bunions that hurt and all."

"You're good, Myrt," he'd said, a sadness unaccountably welling up in him. "You're real good."

"Ah, now, you say that to all the women, I bet."

"In twenty years you forget what women is like," he'd said. "You find they're a kind of habit. Like fags or whiskey. You get so the habit is just a dim memory that don't mean much."

"You can learn the habit all over again, honey," she'd said. "But with me. Exclusive, like they say. Just me."

She'd pushed him aside when he'd wanted to do the breakfast dishes. "You just loll in the parlor. I'll have these done in a jiffy."

Now she was finished. The rattle of dishes in the tiny kitchenette had ceased to sound in the cheap apartment.

He stood puffing on his cigarette, fine beads of sweat breaking on his forehead. His face, like his body, was thin and narrow. Eyes in deep sockets. Eyes that seemed to have once looked into a great nothingness. A sharp nose and thin, twitching lips. Skin as pale as bleached white paper. Nerves very close to the surface all over the thin body and intense sweating face.

She came into the cramped living room, the comfortable, generous size of her making the room seem even smaller and meaner.

She was putting on her coat. He watched her do that, while the nervous tic got worse at the corner of his mouth.

Next her hat. She tucked a wisp of iron gray under the edge of the hat.

"I'm off, honey," she said, turning to him. "Now you have a good day."

She kissed him on the lips. Her mouth was heavy, damp, kind, and gentle.

He let her pull from his outstretched arms. When she was at the door, he said, "Myrt . . ."

"Yeah, honey?"

His mouth was parched. He licked his lips. After a moment, he said, "You have a good day yourself."

"I'll do that," she smiled. "Just knowing that the twenty years is dead and gone will make me have a good day."

She was opening the door. He didn't want to see her leave. He turned toward the window.

He heard the door close. The sound of it was a soft blow, shaking him. He remained at the window, looking at the street below. He was seeing nothing out there.

Twenty years.

Dead and gone.

Everything changed.

The silence of the apartment began to squeeze off his breathing. It felt as if a weight were bearing down hard on his chest.

"My God," he said softly. "My God."

He grabbed his hat and ran from the empty apartment.

In the hallway, he stopped. He could breathe easier now.

Don't be so damn silly, Connors. Don't panic. Control yourself.

He held to the stair rail as he started to walk down the flight to street level.

In the lower hall a door opened. He jumped, spun about. A young brunette woman was getting milk where it had been left beside her apartment door.

She wore a faded housecoat and her hair was done up in aluminum curlers.

"Hello," she said.

"H—Hello," Connors said.

"You're the Mr. Connors from upstairs, ain't you?"

"Y-Yes. That's right."

"Mrs. Connors is awful glad to have you back. All she could talk about . . . Say, you feel all right, Mr. Connors?"

"Could I . . . have a glass of water?"

"Why, sure. Come on in." She turned, raised her voice. "Harry, Mr. Connors from upstairs wants a drink of water."

A heavy male voice inside the apartment said, "Well, let the damned con get it in his own place."

The young woman turned, her face red, her eyes not meeting Connors'. "I'm sorry," she said. "My husband—he's a kind of grouch early in the morning."

"It's all right," Connors said, fumbling, his hat in his hand. He turned and darted from the building. He wasn't running, but he gave the impression that he was.

On the sidewalk, he stopped short. The sun was bright, hurting his eyes. Traffic, snarled and brawling, was a din in his ears.

Good grief, where had all the cars come from? Look at the size and shape of them. They glittered and gleamed with a ferocity that caused him to stand a moment in horror.

He licked his lips and looked up and down the street. Children were playing; people were going in and out of stores; a big, dark woman was arguing in a screeching voice with a pushcart produce peddler.

Connors felt dwarfed by it all. The street reaching endlessly in either direction gave him the sensation that he was being stretched and pulled by the immensity of open space.

So much space.

The size of it built a hard knot in his throat. No order to this space. No gray walls to cut it off at its proper ending point.

He felt a strong urge to move, to flee the feeling that so much space imparted to him.

He dashed into the street.

Brakes squealed.

Horns honked.

A truck came tearing at him like a mountain on the move. The driver leaned out the window. "Ya damn fool, whyn't ya watch where you're going!"

Connors gulped and ran.

He reached the farther curb. He sat down and made an effort to get his breathing under control.

A pair of teenage boys, swaggering against the front of a building, watched Connors. They were a blond boy and a dark one. They looked at each other and grinned. The blond boy flipped his cigarette away.

Connors struggled to his feet. He moved toward the center of the sidewalk. A heavy man in work clothes bumped him, gave him a glare. Connors reeled to one side and collided with a slim, young, dark woman who carried a baby in her arms.

"S-Sorry," he said. He stood in the middle of the sidewalk, people swirling about him. No plan, no pattern to their movements. No order.

His head was spinning.

He was carried forward relentlessly in the tide of humanity. He wanted to claw his way clear, but he was at the corner now; the light was changing and the tide carried him on.

He jostled his way to the safety of a building front. Two young men stepped to either side of him. A blond boy, a dark one. The blond boy was lighting a fresh cigarette.

"Hi, pop," the dark boy said. He had a lean hard face; there was an animal look in his eyes. The early sun glistened on his ducktailed hair.

Connors shrank away from them. There was something menacing in their eyes. Something cruel and hard and new that had come into the world since he'd seen it last.

"You the old con from across the street?" the blond boy asked.

Not so old, Connors tried to say. Forty-six. But his hair was gray and thin, his face pale, lined, twitching. Maybe he did look old to them.

"A real honest-to-john con," the blond boy said. "Real tough."

"He don't look so tough to me, Jerry," the dark boy said.

"How tough are you, pop?"

"I—I'm not so tough."

"Hear that, Jerry? He ain't so tough. What'd they can you for, pop? Taking candy from a baby?"

"No," Connors said.

"Well, what? Come on, give with the details. We're your pals, see? We wanna hear all about it."

"Armed robbery," Connors said in a whisper.

"Yeah? Filling station? Old lady in a grocery store maybe?"

"Armored truck," Connors said.

"Hear that, Jerry? A real tough armored truck cracker."

"What do you want with me?" Connors said.

"We just wanna see how tough you are, pop."

"I told you. I'm not tough. Please let me go."

"We ain't stopping you, pop."

Connors tried to move to one side. He bumped the blond boy.

"Don't shove me, pop," the boy said in a low tone. "Don't shove me. I don't like it, see? I guess I'm about as tough as any con."

Connors' throat worked as he looked at the young, hard animal eagerness of their faces. People eddied all about him, but he felt isolated, alone.

He fought the feeling of weakness in his knees. His eyes scurried in their sockets.

Then he broke and ran.

They followed him for a few steps.

"Let him go, Jerry. I guess we showed 'im. Tougher than any con."

"Yeah, let's see what's doing down the block."

Connors moved blindly through the immensity of space. He felt helpless against the disordered maelstrom about him. Like a man who has wandered naked from his house.

He reached the entrance of a restaurant. It was the place where Myrt worked.

He looked inside for some sign of her. Finally he saw her clearing a table. He stood with his face pressed against the broad front window, watching her until she went into the kitchen.

He turned away and began slow, unreal movements down the sidewalk.

He felt exhausted when he regained the apartment. He stumbled into the bedroom and fell across the bed. The strong feeling that something was wrong rose in him until it was overpowering.

He jerked around and sat up.

The door was open.

He sprang from the bed and slammed the door. Then he returned to the bed and lay down and pulled the covers over himself.

Myrt came in at two o'clock. She worked a split

shift and had each afternoon off from two until five.

He heard her in the small living room. He rose slowly. The bed was wet with the imprint of his sweating body. He stood crouched near the bed, listening to her humming.

The bedroom door opened.

She stopped short, then smiled. "Hello, honey. Taking a nap?"

"I don't want to talk," Connors said.

He walked into the kitchenette. Why had she come? The bedroom had been almost dark and silent. Now, as he stood in the kitchenette, the roar of wild disordered sound from outside came crashing over him. His heart began to pound and his teeth chattered.

Myrt had followed him. She stood in the doorway. "You catching cold, honey?"

"Leave me alone," he said.

"But, baby doll . . ."

"Leave me alone," he said in a louder voice.

"Now, honey," she said. She was coming toward him. Her great, heavy arms reached around him. He felt as if he were suffocating.

He shoved her with all his strength. He saw her twist and fall backward. The back of her head struck the edge of the sink. With her weight, the blow was hard and cruel. She fell down limp and Connors stood over her.

"Myrt?" he said.

There was gray matter and blood spilling out the back of her head.

She was dead.

He was sorry—for a moment.

Then he realized that they'd give him life for this. They'd take him back. Maybe he wouldn't get the same cell that had protected him for twenty years. But a new one would do.

He went into the living room; he looked out the window. He had to look. At the teeming, seething jungle outside.

He looked.

And looking at it, his relief was so great that tears came to his eyes.

## Thievery Touch

Charlie Dobson, 76, lives in a cottage on the outskirts of Chatham, Ont., just beyond the city's garbage collection area. But he gets rid of his garbage with a practical application of the theory that about everyone has a streak of larceny.

Each day Charlie fills a box with his table scraps and discarded tin cans, wraps it attractively and places it on the berm of the highway near his home. After a bit a car stops, the occupants pick up the box, then speed away. "Haven't had a box returned yet," he told reporters.

## Premium Gas

In Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Richard Kossina, 28, appeared in court charged with operating a bootleg still. "I made the stuff to mix with gasoline for my outboard motor," he told the judge.

And in Oklahoma City vice squad officers arrested Anna M. Davis, 35, and seized her hot water bottle which she said contained "a guaranteed pain killer." The officers said the liquid was corn whiskey and the woman was fined $40 for illegal possession of whiskey and vagrancy.

## Museum Money

The thief who stole a package of $1,200 in currency from the home of Dr. J. R. McHugh in Little Rock, Ark., will have to wait until the south rises again before he can spend it. The loot was Confederate money.

## Courtly Decision

The city of San Diego, Calif., recently increased its number of superior courts to 13. However, city officials decided that some defendants might be superstitious. They labeled the 13th court No. 14.

*Business was bad, but Harrod knew how to take care of that. He just parked his car and waited for a shabby, restless-looking girl . . .*

# THE NEW GIRL

*A Novelette*

**by MAX FRANKLIN**

PROMPTLY at 2:30 P.M. a bell sounded. Moments later twin streams of students began to emerge from the two front doors of Fletcher High School. Male students came from the north door, female students from the south one.

The Lincoln convertible, its top down, was parked squarely in front of the girl's exit. The young man in it didn't appear to be paying any attention to the stream of young girls spilling onto the sidewalk and moving past his car. Although he sat with his back against the lefthand door and one arm along the rear of the seat, facing the stream, he didn't seem to see it. His eyes were slitted nearly shut against the smoke curling from a cigarette.

With unerring instinct he dismissed one girl after another as she passed. Those who didn't even give him a curious glance, he ignored entirely. Those who showed enough interest to look him over, he studied in return, though his expression gave no hint that he was even seeing them. This one he dismissed as too young, that one as having too wise a look in her eyes, one because she failed to meet his standard of physical attractiveness, another because she lacked the surface appearance of what he referred to as "class."

He almost made his move when a lushly-built redhead of about eighteen glanced sidewise at him and blushed. He controlled the impulse at the last instant when he saw another girl step from the building. She too was about eighteen, which probably made her a senior. She was a raven-haired

beauty with a fully-developed body and a face whose loveliness was only faintly marred by an expression of restless discontent.

Even though the brunette missed the redhead's attractiveness by a hair, her expression swung the balance her way. Jimmy (Slick) Harrod was an expert at judging women by facial expression. And he knew this girl would be easy.

At first glance she met his qualifications all along the line. She was neat, she had "class," and her clothing indicated she didn't have much money. Her cheap skirt and sweater, though fitting perfectly, had come from some bargain basement. The leather of her meticulously clean pumps was cracked with age and the heels were badly run down.

He waited until she reached the sidewalk. She was looking at him with unabashed interest when he suddenly popped his eyes wide open and exposed his white teeth in an engaging smile.

She stopped, startled, and before she could recover and move on, Harrod asked politely, "Know if Connie Witherwood has left the building yet, Miss?"

"What?" she said. She was flustered, but as the question was so innocuous it would have been rude not to answer it, she didn't walk on.

"Connie Witherwood," Harrod repeated. He always used that name. Sometimes he amused himself by wondering what he would do if some high school actually had a Connie Witherwood enrolled.

Approaching nearer, the girl said, "I don't believe I know her."

"Blonde about your size," Harrod said. After a pause he added, "Not nearly as beautiful, though," and looked her over appreciatively.

The brunette blushed.

"Connie's a neighbor of mine," Harrod went on easily. "Just happened to be passing as school let out, so thought I'd drive her home."

"I'm afraid I don't know her," the girl said again.

Jimmy Harrod glanced at the doorway, through which the last of the girl students were straggling. "Must have missed her." He exposed his teeth in a smile again. "Do you go the same direction as Connie?"

"What direction's that?" she asked.

"What way do you go?" he countered.

She looked him over, recognizing this as a pickup invitation. Nervously she shifted her books from one arm to the other. He waited out her decision without prompting, knowing what it would be. She couldn't have been picked up on the street, crudely, but he had so skillfully built up to the point, it was almost as if they had been introduced. He knew he would pass inspection. He was twenty-seven, but his round, good-looking face and crew cut made him look years younger. She probably was estimating him as twenty-one or two.

"I live south about eight blocks," she said finally. "At Hadley and Genesee."

The address confirmed the impression he had gotten from her clothing. It was in the heart of the slum district. He reached over and opened the car door. "I go within a block of there."

Still she hung back. "You couldn't drive right up to my house," she said. "I—my mother wouldn't like it."

"All right," he said agreeably. "I'll drop you a block away."

The girl glanced around once to see if any of the other students were watching her. Most of them had moved on by now, and the few remaining stragglers were in conversation with each other and seemed to be paying no attention to the convertible. Quickly she slid into the front seat, pulled shut the door and hugged her books against her flat stomach.

Harrod flipped away his cigarette and started the engine. "I'm Jim Harrod," he said casually as he pulled away from the curb.

"I'm Ann Warden," she told him. Raising her face to the breeze, she surreptitiously felt of the fine leather upholstering.

"High-school senior?" he asked.

She nodded.

"Eighteen or over?"

She gave him a suspicious sideglance. "Why?"

"I was going to offer you a cigarette, if you're old enough."

"Oh," she said. "Yes, I'm eighteen."

She took the proffered cigarette and he punched in the dash lighter. When it popped out, he handed it to her, then lit another for himself by it when she gave it back. She took a deep and expert drag and blew the smoke out through her nostrils.

Harrod turned left at the corner and let the car drift slowly toward Genesee, where he turned left again toward Hadley.

"You have a nice car," Ann Warden said.

"Thank you, ma'am. You old enough to drink, too?"

She gave him another quick sideglance. "It's legal after you're eighteen."

"Care for a beer before you go home?"

When she looked dubious, he said, "I'll get you some chlorophyll mints afterward, if you're afraid of your parents."

The girl flushed. "That won't be necessary. I'm not a baby."

"Just trying to be considerate," he said cheerfully. He drove another block, then pulled up before a gaudy cocktail lounge with a modern glass-brick front. "This place look all right?"

She looked it over, self-consciously pretending to decide whether or not it came up to her standards. "I guess," she said. "There aren't any really first-run places in this neighborhood."

When she got out of the car, she dropped her cigarette and carefully stepped on it. Harrod flipped his into the street.

Inside the lounge he led her to a corner table and ordered two beers. Over the beers he attempted to draw her out about herself. Ordinarily, with teenage girls, he found this easy, as it was the favorite subject of most of them. But in this case he ran into unexpected reticence. She chatted uninhibitedly about her school work, the boys she knew and had dated, and about her ambition to become a dress model when she graduated from high school the following month. But she shied away from any reference to her home life.

Because he was an expert at pumping, he eventually pried from her that she was an only child and lived alone with her widowed mother. She said rather vaguely that her mother earned her living by "helping people out part time."

Harrod dropped the subject until the girl had consumed her third beer. Obviously unused to drinking, she was visibly relaxed by then. He decided it was time to reopen the questioning.

"I don't mean to be personal," he said in a frank tone. "But I like you a lot, and hope I can see you again. You interested?"

She smiled at him. "If you'd like."

"Then I think I ought to know something."

"What's that?" she asked.

"What's wrong at home?"

Her smile disappeared. "What do you mean?" she asked in a withdrawn voice.

"You don't want me to drop you in front of your house. Because your mother wouldn't like it, you say. But why should she object? I'm no monster."

Ann started to speak, but he silenced her with a gesture. "I think you're ashamed to have me see where you live. Or maybe you're ashamed to have me see your mother. You won't talk about her, or say much of anything about your home life. What's the matter?"

She gazed at him from stricken eyes.

"Believe me, I'm only trying to clear the air," he said in a sincere tone. "I'm no snob. I don't care what your home life is like, or what your mother is like. I'm only interested in you. But if we're going to go out together some, there shouldn't be this kind of secret wall between us. Why don't you get it off your chest?"

She continued to stare at him for a long time. Then she said in a discouraged tone, "All right. You asked for it. My mother does cleaning work. When she's sober enough. The rest of the time we're on relief. She's the neighborhood drunk. Kids follow her along the street, imitating her stagger and chanting, 'Katie Warden had a snort; that's the reason she lists to port.' Every boy I ever met dropped me the minute he found out who my mother was. Now you can get up and walk away. I won't mind."

He only gave her a gentle smile. "Why should I? I told you I'm not a snob. You free tonight?"

She looked at him in astonishment. "You mean you really don't care?"

"Not a nickle's worth."

She let out a sigh. "You're nice, Jimmy. But I still don't want you to meet her. We'll have to arrange to meet somewhere."

He shrugged. "If you want it that way."

"It won't be for long," she said. "As soon as I graduate next month and get a job, I'm going to get my own room. I'm never even going back to visit her again."

Jimmy Harrod felt a vast sense of elation. He had finally found a girl who met *all* the qualifications. Ann Warden was the sixteenth girl he had "interviewed" during the past month. A number had met his strict requirements of beauty, "class", gullibility and poverty. But the others had all had at least one parent or a watchful relative in the background. And Harrod didn't want any part of a girl whose future progress was going to be checked on periodically by some interested adult.

He said, "Maybe I can steer you into a modelling job when you graduate. And find you a nice room to move to. I've got a lot of contacts."

He did have a lot of contacts. But not of the sort he intimated.

## 2.

After dropping Ann Warden off a block from her home, Jimmy Harrod drove straight to the Warsaw Hotel. The Warsaw rated as a first-class hotel, but it was by no means the finest in town. At least three others outclassed it.

In the lobby Harrod signalled the bell captain to one side. "Any prospects for tonight, Marty?" he inquired.

Marty, the bell captain, was a clean-cut man of about thirty. Without meeting Harrod's eyes, he said, "Hard to say, Slick. There's a few guys registered who look like they might like to cut loose. But nobody asks for a girl until well after dinner. You know how it is."

Harrod frowned. "You giving me a brush-off?"

"Course not, Slick," Marty said quickly. "It's just a dull week. No conventions or anything."

The assurance had a false note which Harrod recognized easily, because he was becoming used to it. In recent months he had encountered the same note in the voices of the bell captains of a half dozen other hotels. Because Marty was his last reliable contact in any of the better hotels, and he didn't want to lose him, Harrod made the mistake of pushing a little.

In a cold tone he said, "You wouldn't want a bug dropped in the manager's ear that you've got a sideline of furnishing male guests with call girls, would you?"

The bell captain's eyes narrowed. For the first time he looked directly at Harrod. "You get me

canned, and you're in even worse trouble, buster. I'll have the cops on your back for pimping."

Abruptly Harrod's manner changed. Summoning a winning smile, he dropped a friendly hand on the other's shoulder. "I was kidding, pal. Why should we fight? We're a team. See what you can rake up for tonight, huh?"

The retreat failed to mollify the bell captain. "Sure," he said a little stiffly. Then, after a pause, "I'm not asking more than twenty-five bucks, though. Too many kicks from guys afterward."

"Twenty-five!" Harrod said, outraged. "When I first brought Judy around, she got a hundred. And marks stood in line to pay it. We took a cut to seventy-five, then to fifty. After you take your fin commission, what's left out of twenty-five? A lousy score."

"It takes top quality to bring top price," the bell captain said cynically. "Judy isn't the same babe she was three years ago. I'm not asking my customers more than twenty-five for a wornout hophead."

Harrod suppressed his anger by chewing at his lower lip. "Thirty," he said finally. "At least I want twenty-five net."

Marty shrugged. "I'll try it once," he said. "But if there's a kickback on the price, next time it goes down to twenty-five. Maybe I can push her on some drunk too liquored up to spot the needle holes in her arms. Have her drift in around nine and sit in the lobby, so she'll be on tap when something comes up."

"Okay," Harrod said.

As he left the hotel he reflected that when he had started Judy out, no bell captain would have dared suggest she come in and wait for a prospect to turn up. They phoned well in advance, sometimes days ahead, and tried to outbid each other for the girl.

Harrod's apartment was an elaborately-furnished, six-room place on exclusive Rivershore Drive. Like his Lincoln convertible, it was a symbol of the luxury he loved.

Such luxury cost money, which was the reason he arrived home irked at Judy Poulson. For months she hadn't produced enough to keep him in proper style.

Although it was six o'clock when he got home, Judy had just gotten up. She sat in the front room in a rumpled negligee, her eyes still puffy from sleep and her blonde hair unkempt. She was only in her early twenties, and still possessed a fine, firm-lined body. But her once-beautiful face was ravaged by the lines of middle-age. She jumped nervously when Harrod slammed the door as he entered.

"Aren't you even dressed yet?" he greeted her.

She only wet her lips and looked at him expectantly.

"Marty over at the Warsaw wants you in the lobby by nine," he said. "Your rate just took another dip. All you're to ask is thirty."

Still she didn't speak, merely eyeing him with the same expectant look.

"For God's sake, you're getting so you can't even talk until you've had a mainliner," he said disgustedly. Taking a small pill box from his pocket, he withdrew a folded bit of paper and sailed it into her lap. "Give yourself a fix and come alive."

He walked on into the bedroom and examined his face in his dresser mirror. Deciding he needed a shave before going out again, he stripped off his coat, tie and shirt and went into the bathroom.

Meantime Judy had followed him into the bedroom and was silently removing a spoon, hypodermic syringe and a small alcohol lamp from a drawer of her dressing table.

Harrod lathered his face, stropped his already-keen straight-edged razor a few times and carefully shaved. When he returned to the bedroom, Judy was seated before the dressing table brushing her blonde hair. The spoon, syringe and lamp were no longer in sight. Her face was calm, almost gay, and even without makeup, looked years younger.

He stood watching her for a moment, then grunted and began to put on a clean shirt. She smiled at him in the mirror.

"We eating out, hon?" she asked.

"I am," he said. "You can eat where you damned please. Just don't forget to be at the Warsaw at nine. And get home with the whole thirty, or I'll beat your brains out."

She seemed unperturbed by his rough answer. "I haven't any money," she said.

He knotted his tie without answering, shrugged back into his suit coat. As he started to leave the room, she said, "What am I supposed to eat on?"

He stopped, walked toward her and raised one hand as though he intended to backhand her face. He didn't, however. She stared up at him expressionlessly.

"Mustn't mar the merchandise," she said.

Dropping his arm, he took out a wallet and picked two one-dollar bills from an assortment of tens and twenties. He tossed them in her general direction, and they fluttered to the floor.

Staring down at them, she said, "Only two dollars?"

"Baby, when you drop down to netting only twenty-five bucks, you're lucky you eat at all. It takes ten a day just to keep you in H. If you want more for food, I'll have to cut off your supply of stuff."

Her eyes widened. "No, Jimmy," she said quickly. "Two is enough." Stooping, she picked up the bills.

Harrod went on out, slamming the front door behind him.

At seven o'clock Harrod parked his convertible a half block from Hadley and Genesee, leaned back in the seat and lit a cigarette. Five minutes later Ann Warden opened the righthand door and slid

in beside him. She wore the same cracked pumps she had worn that day, he noted, but she had substituted a cheap print dress for the sweater and skirt. Even though it, like her outfit of the afternoon, was obviously from a bargain basement, she filled it out attractively.

"Have any trouble?" he asked.

"From Mom?" she inquired, and laughed a little bitterly. "She doesn't know I'm alive half the time. She's drunk again."

He started the engine. "Where'd you like to have dinner?"

She considered the question as though she were sorting over in her mind the many restaurants she knew, finally said, "I don't care. Long as it's no place where they wear formals."

He took her to Zott's, a quiet supper club with dim lighting, a soft-playing orchestra and reasonable prices. It was a fairly run-of-the-mill place, but it delighted the girl. Her attempt at *savoir-faire* only made it more apparent that it was her first experience in a night club of any sort.

By the time they had topped a filet mignon dinner with a bottle of champagne, she was radiant with happiness.

By midnight they had hit three more small clubs, dancing a few numbers and having a highball or two in each. Ann was a little drunk when they left the third club.

"Don't think I ought to have any more to drink," she said as she wavered unsteadily in front of the car door, waiting for him to open it.

"All right," he said agreeably. "We'll just drive for a while, and blow the cobwebs out of your brain."

He drove out the old river road, found a seldom-used side-road which ended in a low-walled dead end at the very edge of the river bluff. He parked with his front bumper touching the wall, and shut off his lights. For a few moments they sat quietly, gazing out over the moonlit water.

"May I have a cigarette?" she asked presently.

"Sure," he said. "Like a new kick?"

She glanced at him in the moonlight. "What do you mean?"

Instead of answering, he took a flat cardboard box from the glove compartment and removed a single cigarette from it. Lighting it, he took a deep drag, pretended to inhale without actually letting the smoke leave his mouth, and blew it out again. The girl wrinkled her nose at the acrid smell.

"What kind of a cigarette is that?" she asked.

"Try it and see," he suggested, handing it to her.

She held it in her hand, examining it dubiously. "Is this what they call a reefer?"

"Yeah," he said. "But you don't have to worry. I won't let you get too far gone."

"Isn't it a kind of dope?"

"It's not habit-forming," he said. "It just gives you a kick. Go ahead. I'll take care of you."

Tentatively she took a small puff, giggled and said, "It tastes funny."

"You have to inhale to get the effect," he told her. "Go ahead. Don't be afraid."

Cautiously she took another small puff, then drew deeply on the cigarette and inhaled the smoke.

Ten minutes later he gently removed the butt from her fingers and crushed it out in the ash tray. "How do you feel?" he asked.

She gave him a remote smile. "Like I could do anything. Fly to the moon, even."

Casually he dropped his arm across her shoulders and drew her against his chest. Willingly she turned her lips upward for his kiss. She didn't make the slightest protest when he began to unfasten buttons. The marijuana had killed every inhibition in her.

3.

In the following weeks Jimmy Harrod saw Ann Warden almost nightly. Their evenings began to follow a pattern. He would pick her up a half block from her home, take her dining and drinking, then climax the evening by making love to her.

At first he drove out the old river road to the same spot he had taken her the first night. But as their love making settled into a routine, they began to use tourist cabins.

One night she said, "Why don't we go to your place instead of wasting money on cabins, Jimmy? Don't you live alone?"

"Sure," he said. "We'll do that some night."

But he kept putting the night off. Even if Judy were out on a call, there were too many evidences of permanent feminine occupancy in the apartment.

Another matter he found necessary to evade was Ann's questions as to what he did for a living. In the beginning she was content with his vague statement that he was in "advertising," but as time went on she began to express curiosity as to just exactly where he worked and what he did there. Forced to improvise, he told her he was a free-lance copywriter for a number of agencies, and that he did his work at home. This seemed to satisfy her.

Only occasionally did he produce marijuana cigarettes during this period. He brought them out often enough to keep her interested in them, yet infrequently enough to convince her that their lack left no craving in her. By the time her graduation from high school was only a few days off, Harrod was ready to make his next move.

"What are your plans for graduation night?" he asked.

She looked surprised. "Why, whatever you want."

"Isn't the school having some kind of a dance?"

Ann wrinkled her nose. "That's kid stuff. You don't want to go to a high-school dance, do you?"

"Not me," he said. "I thought maybe you planned to go with one of the students."

Her expression turned a little hurt. "Don't you

want to take me out that night?"

Harrod grinned at her. "Sure, baby. I just didn't want to bust up any other plans you had. I'll pick you up outside the school right after the ceremony."

The graduation ceremony was scheduled for eight o'clock, and was over by nine. Ann was the first student outside. Slipping off her white robe and cap, she tossed it into the back seat and said, "Let's get out of here."

Up until midnight Harrod took her on a round of the lesser night clubs, as usual. When they left the fourth club they had visited, he drove toward Rivershore Drive.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"You'll see," he told her.

He parked in front of a clean, modern-looking apartment building. Leading her inside by the hand, he took her up on a self-service elevator to the third floor. Halfway down the hall from the elevator he keyed open a door and stepped aside for her to enter first.

"Is this your place?" she asked, gazing around the beautifully-furnished living room with wide eyes. "Why, it's wonderful!"

He took her on a conducted tour of the whole apartment. In the bedroom she glanced from the bureau to the dressing table and said, "How come you have a woman's dressing table?"

"It came with the set," he said easily.

Walking over to it, he drew out a drawer to show her it was empty. Nowhere in the apartment was there any longer any evidence that a woman had ever lived there. Harrod had carefully removed the last traces the day before.

Back in the living room again, he asked, "Drink?"

She considered, then shook her head. "I think maybe I've had enough."

"How about a reefer?"

"All right," she agreed.

He started toward the bedroom, then stopped in the doorway. "This is a big night," he said. "You only graduate from high school once. Let's have a real kick."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

In answer he took her hand and led her to the bedroom. From a bureau drawer he drew out a spoon, hypodermic syringe and alcohol lamp. She watched fascinatedly as he emptied a paper of powder into the spoon, carried it to the bathroom and dribbled a little water on top of it.

When he returned, she said, "What is it? Morphine or cocaine or something?"

"H," he said. "Heroin. Reefers are kid stuff alongside of this."

"I don't think I'd better," she said. "I don't want to be a dope addict."

He grinned at her as he lighted the alcohol lamp. "Do I look like a dope addict?"

"No," she admitted.

"Well, it's five years since I took my first shot. I only take it for kicks. You don't get hooked if you know how to use it."

She watched him hold the spoon over the flame of the lamp. "People do become addicts," she ventured.

"Just stupid people. This boy will never get hooked. The trick is to take it only once in a while. Hit it every day, and you're gone. But you're safe as long as you take it just for kicks. You don't have to be afraid. Think I'd let anything happen to you?"

"No, of course not," she said.

Removing the spoon from the flame, he drew the now dissolved powder into the syringe. "Come here, baby," he said. "This will give you a feeling out of this world."

Three days later Ann Warden walked out on her alcoholic mother without a good-by and moved in with Jimmy Harrod. He bought her a complete set of new clothes and sent her to a beauty parlor. The result surpassed even his expectations. With good clothing and expert beauty advice, the girl was a knockout.

Harrod decided the investment was worth every cent it had so far cost him, and would continue to cost him for some time.

By the simple expedient of telling Ann he was working on "contacts" to line her up a top dress-modelling job, Harrod kept her from looking for work herself. And by explaining that such arrangements took time, he stalled her for two months.

By then he had her thoroughly addicted to heroin.

He picked a Saturday afternoon when she was beginning to feel the need for a shot to finally expose his hand. They had been sitting in the front room watching a televised baseball game, and the girl had been stirring restlessly for some time. Finally she rose, entered the bedroom and returned with the lamp, spoon and syringe.

"Want to make me a little fix, honey?" she asked.

Harrod said unconcernedly, "Haven't got any."

She looked at him with her mouth open. It was the first time he had so much as suggested that his supply wasn't unlimited.

"None at all?" she asked.

He glanced at her from narrowed eyes. "That stuff costs a lot of money, kid. You better cut it out for a while."

She returned the rig to the bedroom. Back in the front room again, she attempted to resume interest in the game, but she couldn't keep from fidgeting.

"What's the matter with you?" he finally asked, looking at her.

She shifted position again. "How far do you have to go to get the stuff, Jimmy?"

"Not far. Why?"

"Would you mind going out and getting me some?"

He stared at her so long, she flushed. "You're hooked, aren't you?" he said eventually.

"No, I'm not," she said defensively. "It's just—well, I feel like a fix right now. I won't bother you again."

"You sure won't," he said flatly. "You're cut off as of now."

Her body began to tremble. "Please, Jimmy. If it's the cost, I'll pay you back as soon as I get my modelling job."

"What modelling job?" he inquired. "That deal fell through."

"What?"

"The guy I was working on got transferred to the west coast. I can't get you a job."

After a moment of shocked silence, she said faintly, "Then I'll get a job myself. I'll start looking Monday."

He grinned without mirth. "It's no good, baby. No fifty or sixty a week's going to feed your habit. Know what that stuff costs?"

She shook her head.

"Ten bucks a day for the amount you're taking."

This wasn't true, but the girl had no way of knowing it wasn't. Harrod had been giving her ten grains of diluted heroin a day—diluted so much with powdered milk that she actually was taking little more than a grain and a half. The local retail price for a ten-grain paper was two dollars. Harold had a wholesale contact from whom he got it for seventy-five cents.

Ann began to cry.

Rising from his chair, Harrod crossed to her and gave her a comforting pat on the shoulder. "Tell you what, baby. I know how you can earn all the money you need. Enough to keep feeding the habit while you gradually taper off."

Drying her tears, she looked up hopefully. "How Jimmy?"

"How does a hundred dollars a day sound to you?"

Her eyes widened. "A hundred a day! For what?"

"There's a furniture-dealer's convention in town over at the Warsaw. I was talking to Marty the bell captain yesterday, and he said women you wouldn't look at twice are getting fifty dollars a date. With your face and figure, you'd bring a hundred easy."

She stared at him, at first not comprehending. Then her face grew slack with shock.

"What's there to it?" he said. "All you have to do is be nice to some guy for a few hours, and he hands you a hundred. How could you make it any easier?"

"You mean *sleep* with some strange man?" she asked incredulously.

Shrugging, he returned to his chair. "Of course if you'd just rather sweat out the shakes—" he said.

By seven P.M. she was begging him to arrange her a date. She would have agreed to anything to kill the incessant gnawing at the edges of her nerves.

Making no excuses, deliberately letting her know he had been in possession of a supply of heroin all along, he drew a paper from his pocket and made her a fix. He wanted her to realize he intended to use the drug as a whip from that point on. She could obey, or go without it.

When her shakes had subsided, he went to the phone and called the Warsaw.

4.

Once she had capitulated, Ann caused no further trouble. Without argument she accepted every date Harrod arranged for her, and she obediently brought him the money she earned.

This amounted to quite a bit. Once again having a commodity which was in demand, Harrod had no difficulty in selling it. He made arrangements with the bell captains of five other leading hotels in addition to the Warsaw to phone him whenever some monied out-of-towner asked for a high-class call girl. Ann's bookings sometimes ran a week in advance, and Harrod kept her busy seven nights a week.

In turn he treated her in a manner he regarded as generous. It was against his principles to let his women have any money other than pin money, but Ann had all the comforts money could buy. He bought her all the expensive clothing and lingerie she required, and the best of beauty treatment.

This in itself was only sound business, as the trappings of class were necessary to bring a class price. But he wasn't niggardly in matters which had nothing to do with her sales value either. They consistently dined in the finest restaurants and, when it didn't interfere with her work, attended the best shows and went to the best night clubs. Most of the shows had to be matinees, and usually she had to leave the clubs by ten at the latest to keep a date, but at least the gesture was there.

He also kept her regularly supplied with heroin. Not as much as she wanted, however. As her system became inured to the drug, its tendency was to demand larger and larger doses. Knowing the devastating effects heroin could have on an addict who had unlimited access to it, Harrod exercised strict control over the dosage. He had no intention of letting the girl burn out her usefulness any sooner than necessary. With the practiced eye of a medic he kept her just on the verge of craving, so that she would unquestioningly follow his orders, yet never let the craving become so great that her customers would noticed anything wrong with her.

He insisted that her shots be administered on the inner parts of her thighs, too, so that they wouldn't be noticeable. These sections become pocked with needle marks, but the rest of her body remained as flawlessly smooth as ever.

If Ann was aware of her slave status, she gave

no sign of it. To all outward appearances she was completely content with her lot. She showed no resentment at having been forced into the life she was leading, nor at having to turn over her full earnings. Probably the reason for this peculiar docility was that she now really lived for only one thing: heroin. And Harrod was the supplier of that. As long as he continued the supply, she was not only willing, but eager to do his bidding.

Unlike most addicts, she was a slave not just to the drug, but to the source of the drug. She now earned enough money to feed the habit on her own and accumulate a bank account on top of it. The trouble was that she had no idea where to obtain heroin except from Harrod.

Over and above expenses, including living expenses, Jimmy Harrod began banking nearly two thousand dollars a month.

One evening shortly before Christmas, and about four and a half months after Ann had started to become a source of profit, Harrod had a visitor. It was about eleven P.M., Ann had left for a date an hour earlier, and Harrod was sluggishly watching television when the door buzzer sounded.

Grunting from the effort of getting up from his comfortable chair, he rose to answer it.

At first he hardly recognized the woman standing in the hall, she had changed so. Her face was so gaunt, the cheekbones were hollow and her lips were a bloodless straight line. A film of perspiration covered her forehead and cheeks. Her reddened eyes were watering so much, she appeared to be crying. They blinked constantly, keeping time with a nervous tic in her throat.

"Hello, Jimmy," she said.

When he recognized the woman as Judy Poulson, he was so startled, he involuntarily drew back a step. Before he could recover, she slipped past him into the apartment. She made straight for the bedroom.

Leaving the front door open, he hurried after her. She was pulling open the drawer of the dressing table where she once kept her heroin rig.

"Where did you put it?" she asked, looking up at him.

Roughly he took her arm and started to drag her toward the front room. "What in the devil do you think you're doing?" he demanded. "There isn't anything here that belongs to you."

She jerked her arm so violently, it broke his grip. "You've got to help me, Jimmy," she said in an intense voice. "I've got to have a fix."

"You won't get one here," he said, reaching for her again.

Evading his grasp, she put the bed between them. "Just one, Jimmy," she pleaded. "Just this one time."

"Get out of here, you worn-out tramp!" He rounded the bed, but she scrambled across it to put it between them again.

"Please, Jimmy. Just one fix, and I'll leave."

"God damn you!" he said, exasperated at not being able to catch her.

"Me?" she inquired in a high voice. "I should be swearing at you. Look at me."

He scowled at her. "Is it my fault you're a junkie?"

"Is it his fault?" she asked, staring at the ceiling as though she addressed heaven. "Whose else? I never heard of the junk until you initiated me." She lowered her watering eyes from the ceiling to glare across the bed at him. "Just look at me, Jimmy. What do you see? A woman of forty? Fifty, maybe? In case you forgot, I'm just twenty-five. You proud of yourself?"

"You going to get out of here?" he asked in an ominous tone.

"When I get a fix. You owe me a fix. You owe me a hundred fixes. Just for that last lousy deal you owe me plenty. I know what you did."

Harrod's eyes jumped to the bedroom doorway. Ann Warden had quietly appeared there and stood watching, her face white.

"Shut up!" Harrod said to Judy.

Unaware of the girl behind her, Judy's voice rose to hysterical pitch. "You even got some final salvage out of me, didn't you, Jimmy? A hundred bucks from the madam for steering me to that cat house. You couldn't just kick me out. You had to sell me like so much dog meat."

Ann moved into the room and said woodenly, "It fell through. He was passed-out drunk by the time I got there."

Judy swung to face the new arrival. She looked Ann up and down slowly. "You're my replacement, are you? How old are you? Eighteen, nineteen?"

Ann said nothing, merely staring at the woman with a kind of pitying distaste.

"I suppose he's got you hooked, hasn't he?" Judy said. "Hooked good."

"Shut up!" Harrod said.

"I will not shut up!" Judy screamed at him. Turning back to Ann, she said in a softer voice, "Take a good look at me, sister. He started me at your age, too. And I wasn't the first one. I replaced an old hag who looked like I do now. God knows how many others there were before her. Jimmy's women are only good for three or four years. Then they're worn-out junkies like me. Look at me good, sister, because you'll look just like me at my age. Twenty-five."

Harrod made a sudden bound across the bed and managed to grab one of Judy's wrists. Spinning her around, he twisted her arm up into the center of her back. He pushed her from the room walking on tiptoe.

"You let out another peep and I'll rip your arm off at the shoulder socket," he growled into her ear.

She moaned a little at the excruciating pain in her arm, but she didn't say anything. He pushed her straight through the front room, out the open door

and into the hall. He slammed the door, locked it and bolted it.

Then he stood for a moment with his ear against the door, listening. From the other side of the door there was the sound of sniffling. After a few moments he heard footsteps move away toward the elevator.

Ann was standing motionless in the same position when he returned to the bedroom.

"Sorry about the ruckus, baby," he said gruffly. "The screwball got in the door before I knew what she was up to."

"It's all right," Ann said.

"She's nuttier than a peanut bar," he said. "You didn't believe any of that stuff she was spouting, did you?"

Ann shook her head.

"She was a junkie before I ever knew her. The damn fool, busting in here and wanting a fix. I should have clobbered her the minute I opened the door."

Ann walked off into the bathroom. Following, he leaned against the door jamb and watched as she stared into the bathroom mirror. Her fingers rose to touch her face delicately, almost fearfully.

"You won't find any lines there," he said reassuringly. "You're still the best-looking woman in town."

Without giving any sign that she had heard, she raised her skirt and carefully examined the needle holes on the inner parts of her thighs.

"Too bad your date fell through," he remarked. "But a good night's sleep will do you good. What say we hit the bed early for a change?"

Dropping her skirt, she said, "All right."

Harrod turned and re-entered the bedroom. As he undressed and put on his pajamas, he listened for the customary sound of Ann undressing also in the bathroom. Failing to hear it, he walked to the door and saw that she was gazing into the mirror again.

"Quit admiring yourself and come to bed," he said impatiently.

She glanced at him. "All right. I'll be there in a minute."

Turning his back, he went over to the bed, drew back the covers and climbed in. When five minutes had passed with no sound from the bathroom, he decided to let her get over her mood by herself. Switching off the bedlamp, he composed himself for sleep.

Five minutes later Ann, still fully clothed glanced into the bedroom. By the light seeping from the open bathroom door she could see him sleeping peacefully on his back. He never used a pillow, and his chin was elevated slightly, as though he were leaning back in a barber chair, waiting for a shave.

Going to the medicine cabinet, she took down Harrod's straightedged razor.

For a moment or two she stared at the glittering blade.

Then she carried it into the bedroom.

## *Stop Thief*

Permission to sell stolen tires has been requested from the Wisconsin Secretary of State by an automobile tire dealer. Alvin Stolen, of Monroe, plans to go into business under the name of Stolen Tires, Inc.

## *Airtight Alibi*

An overnight prisoner for drunkenness in the Huntington, W. Va., jail demanded a receipt for his $14 fine in city court. "I'm not proud that I stayed in jail all night," he explained, "but I want to make sure my wife knows where I was and why."

## *Thieves At Work*

The burglar who broke into the Century Athletic Club, Seattle, Wash., may not have been greedy, but he was certainly strong. The loot consisted of two barbells, one weighing 115 pounds and the other 120.

And the burglar who entered a locker plant at Monon, Ind., must have been a vegetarian. Ignoring hundreds of pounds of choice meat cuts, all he took was a sheet of three-cent postage stamps.

*She awoke suddenly, and she knew it the minute she opened her eyes. There was someone in the room . . .*

# MIDNIGHT CALLER

by WADE MILLER

NINA awoke at midnight, staring, certain there was someone in the bedroom. She turned her head slowly. In the farthest corner, on the chair, she thought she could make out a shape.

It was a man. In the dark he was faceless.

"Who is it?" she whispered.

The shape towered to its feet. She still couldn't see any more than arms, torso and head, advancing. All the moonlight from the window was on her. Such a warm night, she had left the window raised, the blind up. Now she noticed the screening, bellied outward, unfastened at the bottom.

Her shaking hand reached out for the bedside lamp.

Knuckles cracked across her mouth. She kept from screaming.

"I didn't say do that," said the man.

She lay there, trembling. He stood over her for a moment. Then she turned toward the window. He closed it and lowered the blind.

He turned on the bed lamp and she could see him.

His face wasn't as bad as she had expected. He

looked like a man who had worried a lot, and the lines beside his mouth were deep. The tight controlled way he kept his lips clamped together was somehow terrible, as if someone had cut the muscles so he could never again smile.

He studied her, and worst of all were his eyes, yellow and unreasoning. By his eyes she knew she had no chance of talking sense to him.

She tried not to babble and her voice came out weak but clear. "Is there something special you came after? Money? Clothes?"

He wore no coat, simply a white shirt—not too soiled—plain denim work trousers and plain work shoes.

He didn't answer. She tried to sit up.

He shoved her down again. His hand was strong and sweaty against her bare shoulder.

He said, "Keep lying down. When you let people get up or stand up sometimes they keep growing until they're bigger than you are. You know?"

Nina nodded, wanting to scream. The scream was big in her throat and she thought she'd choke if she didn't let it out.

Suddenly, he sat down on the bed. It creaked with his weight. Slowly, not daring to draw his attention, she moved her legs away from him.

He looked at the size of the bed, double. He said, "You got a husband?"

She nodded.

"Where is he?"

She managed, "Away."

"You expect him back?"

She nodded—too quickly.

"You're lying."

Yes, she was lying. She glanced miserably at the humpback shape of the phone on the other side of the bed, a thousand miles away.

"What's your name?"

"Nina."

He shook his head. "I don't want to call you that. I'd rather call you Marie."

She couldn't follow that but she said, "All right," and he repeated softly, "Marie."

The next door neighbors were coming home from somewhere. Their headlights flashed across the lowered blind. She heard their garage door open and close. She wanted them to notice the loosened screen but they didn't. She heard the wife laugh as they went into the house. Oh, God—would she ever laugh again?

He was staring at her heavy breasts, as if he was watching her heart beat. She had worn to bed a yellow nylon nightgown with lace cups and ribbon straps. He could see right through the lace. She had to say something.

She asked him his name.

To her surprise, he told her. First, he pinched the bridge of his nose, as if his eyes were tired or as if he had been drinking or as if he were trying to reach his brain. "Robert Babcock," he said. Then he added, "But I don't want to be him. I want to be Mike. I'm better as Mike."

"All right—Mike."

"Marie."

She was trying to draw the single blanket and sheet up over her breasts. He noticed and became angry. "Don't do that!" He tore the covers down to her waist. She stiffened with fright.

Then he said gently, "You don't have any lipstick on."

She had cleaned her mouth before going to bed. She touched her lips. The upper one was swollen where he had struck her, but she wasn't bleeding.

He went to the dressing table and rummaged and came back with a lipstick. She raised on her elbow and made up her mouth.

He said, "That's better. You're a very glamorous creature, Marie. You ought to keep yourself up. You're not the kind that would keep asking for more, are you?"

He put his hand on her stomach and she froze inside. She looked at the phone again, then at the window. Next door, the couple were in bed by now, sleeping or making love, not at the mercy of . . .

He ripped the covers off the bed entirely. "Marie with the red mouth." His hand drifted over her hair, tangled with sleep. He touched her ears as if they were jewels.

He rolled up his fist and then opened it. She whimpered and put her hand to her mouth as if she hadn't meant it.

He looked at the cling of the nightgown over the round of her hips. He pushed the hem up her legs so he could gaze at her tight-clasped thighs.

He stood up and began to unbutton his shirt.

Nina saw the dawn against the drawn blinds. He was curled on his side, sleeping heavily, snoring a little. She rolled across the bed to the phone.

She thought about the police. Instead, she dialed the State Psychologist, downtown. Finally, she got through to his private number.

She said, "Doctor? This is Nina Babcock. Yes. My husband has slipped out of the institution again. He's here." She listened, then added, "You'll have them treat him gently, won't you?"

*"According to the pattern, we should catch our murderer when the moon is full . . ."*

by

**WARREN J.**

**SHANAHAN**

# moon bright, moon fright

THE MOON is hanging high in the sky, Mother, and the storm-driven winds are trailing black fingers of clouds across it. The Spanish moss dangling from the thick oak trees is murmuring; the heavy gnarled branches are swaying and creaking a symphony of sympathy for me; the hush sounds of the swamp whisper to me just the way you do. The night is soft and warm like your arms around me and the dust of the road plays with my toes the way you did when I was a baby.

The moon is high and clear and bright. Our work must start now, mustn't it, Mother?

*The time is now, my son.*

How strange the house looks, all silver bathed. Not old and worn and scabby, but like the shining palaces of heaven. The peering window eyes watch me quietly, undisturbed. Only the front door is dark, huddling back hidden in the shadows of the porch like it is afraid of me. Why? I haven't come to hurt the weathered door. It must only vaguely realize that, for though it doesn't creak or protest my entrance, it still is muted with fear. The room is so dark I must stand here quietly till my eyes can pierce the blackness, waiting, waiting, listening to her breathing—breathing her last. There! Now I can see her. She looks peaceful and still and innocent. Her throat is white and bare and pulsing with life. Soon a red gash will appear across it, to match the mouth she laughed and smiled and enticed with in life. My knife is long, sharp. It shines white-bright

back at the moon that peeks down, matching the moon's splendor. My fingers are hard and strong around the bone handle, firm as my purpose they clasp it. The razor edge casts a thin dark shadow across the moving pulsating throat; I press down quickly, feel only slight resistance and sweep the blade back. The flesh springs open for my inspection; then the heavy life fluid gushes into the vacancy, pours over my hands warm and liquid. It is done. Can't I go home, Mother? I fear what is ahead of me.

*Not yet, my son. Finish! Finish! Cut out the parts that stole away my husband, your father, so that no one may look upon her again and desire her. Has not the Lord said: "If a part offendeth thee, cut it out"? Cut, my son.*

There, it is done. Now I just plunge into the swamp waters, holding tight to my knife, washing the stains away. You were right, Mother. It was enjoyable work.

Sheriff Mattson drove to the railroad station in the hot afternoon sun and watched the daily train chug laboriously alongside the dilapidated structure. Mattson got out of the car when the train groaned to a stop, though he didn't relish moving into the broiling heat.

His reason for being there alighted from an outmoded coach—a man over six feet tall, painfully thin and rather ascetic looking. Upon catching sight of the rotund sheriff, the man headed directly for him, hand outstretched, abandoning his baggage on the rickety platform.

"Matt, Matt," he said, smiling, "it's good to see you again. It's been too long."

"Well, well," the sheriff said slowly and heavily, taking the extended hand in a hard grip, "if it ain't Charley Evans, all growed up. Or now that you're so high 'n mighty at the State University, is it Professor Evans?"

Evans shook his head, still smiling. Then he said, "Nothing ever changes much around here—not even the trains."

"I guess that's right. You might call us a sort of an oasis. But let's get your baggage and we'll go on to my place."

"How's the old homestead?" Evans asked, getting into the car.

The sheriff shook his head as he struggled getting behind the wheel. "It's not much now. Two hurricanes and fifteen years don't tend to improve a place, you know. Some folks from up north want to buy it. They're offering a fair price."

"What do you think, Matt? Should I sell?"

The sheriff shrugged non-committally. "It's your place. I'll drive you out tomorrow and let you look at it. Could be, that'll help you decide."

They rode along the dusty road in silence. The palmetto, lining both sides, made a hot enclosed aisle of the road. Evans sat up straighter when he saw the stumbling figure up ahead, saw him fall down, then get up and lurch on again.

Just when he was at the point of putting a question to the sheriff about this, the sheriff stamped on the brake, came to a skidding, dusty stop.

The man staggered up to them, wide-eyed, incoherent, drool running down the side of his slack jaw. Mattson caught him in a bear embrace and guided him into the back seat. "Take it easy, now, Les," he said. "Just take it easy and tell us what happened."

"Julia," the man said tonelessly, his mouth open, just his tongue working. "Julia—Julie Corgy—she's —my God—Julie Corgy—."

The sheriff hurried behind the wheel of the car, spun the car around in a screaming turn. The distraught man fell off the back seat and remained, mumbling to himself, on the floor.

"Something serious?" Evans yelled over the roar of the engine.

Mattson nodded, directing the car around pin turns. "Les Shay ain't one to break up easy," he shouted. "Somethin's drove him half out of his mind! Must be Julia was killed! What else?"

Evans held on when the sheriff, finally, came to a jolting halt before a house on the edge of the big swamp. They both raced for the house, its door flying open under Mattson's weight. The sheriff was propelled into the room, but he pulled up short, his eyes widening. After one look, Evans staggered back out of the house and doubled over the porch railing, his stomach rebelling at what his eyes had seen.

Soon Mattson came out and closed the door behind him, his face drawn, taut; his whole body seemed slimmer. Knowing lynching material when he saw it, he radioed the State Police. Joining Evans on the porch, they sat there listening to the ravings of Les Shay, gone temporarily insane. They didn't attempt to detain Shay, when he suddenly arose and went off at a staggering run.

The police came and immediately cordoned off the area. In so doing, they prevented the whole county from trampling the ground flat. They worked outwards in a circle from the house and discovered exactly nothing.

The townspeople were shocked, horrified, repulsed; they thirsted for vengeance. None of them had ever seen such a gruesome sight and only the oldest members of the State Police admitted to remembering anything even vaguely similar. There were mumblings of "Jack the Ripper" and the big newspapers took up the cry.

Late that night, Evans sat in the ponderous sheriff's living room, talking more to divert his mind than to develop anything of value. "Look," he began, "there has to be a reason for every crime—a motive. Let's try to figure out who would or could have done it, and work from there. At least we'll have a place to start."

Mattson shook his head, smiling wryly. "We did that," he said, "we'd have to arrest the male population of about six different counties in Georgia and Florida—and all of the women folk. Julia was a right popular gal and mighty fickle in her ways. Men was her livin'. Every woman I've ever known hated her, even most of her own kind. Guess they couldn't stand the competition. No—that ain't the way to work it."

"Well, how about this," Evans said. "The one that cut up Julia—even the coroner remarked that it was a pretty expert job—might be a disconsolate medical student or a—"

"For a man who was born down here," Mattson interrupted half irritably, "you sure don't know much about these people. Pretty near every one of 'em does their own butcherin' and a pig's carcass ain't too different from a human's. Use your brains, man."

"I've been trying that," Evans said, "and everything adds up to exactly nothing. Here I'm supposed to be the foremost criminologist in the state, instructing the police in scientific crime detection, and I'm stumped by a backwoods murder. How can I properly ever teach again when this murder fairly shouts for solution and I don't know where to start. That my purpose in coming here was to sell the old homestead doesn't console *me* in the least."

"Now, now," Mattson soothed, "we're doing all right. It's just that in this particular case we can't do nothin' but plod along, waiting to see what turns up. I know these people—even while we're sitting here, they're out working for us—callin' their neighbors, talkin' it over, findin' and even makin' up clues. Somethin' will turn up—it always does."

"A hell of a way to solve a murder," muttered Professor Evans.

"It works," Mattson said.

The moon is high again, Mother, floating in the sky like a big silver-white ball. Do you remember the white ball you gave me to play with—round and white. It was one of my first toys. I wonder what happened to it.

The wind blowing from the swamp is cool against my cheek, touching and soothing both me and the ground after the heat of the day. The low gentle sounds of the critters encourage me, softly urging me on. These are still my true friends, Mother, my first playmates and, like me, night hunters. The cat, the 'possum, the 'coon, the hawk, the 'gator—all are me, are one. Their eyes shine blazing from the deep dark hiding places as they watch me trot silently along. They know and admire me. They wouldn't run out on this road. Nor should I —my feet are not for the hard tar, but for the soft earth and swamp. And now I can see two houses at once. I don't like this, Mother. It's too crowded—too many people.

*Quiet, my son. Have no fears. These are the people of the day. They ignore the night, sleep through it. Your passing is unknown to them. These are not like your friends of the swamp who live, play and hunt in the comforting dark. These are the sun worshippers, who foolishly work through the heat of the day, who are afraid of the night.*

I can see the judge's garden now—the tall corn trying to hide the back of the house. A light shines out from where he is reading, just like you said. The corn stalks and the tomato bushes try to hold me back as I slip through them. They want to protect him. He sits at his desk, his back to the door. He will never hear me as I enter, ax in hand. But why, Mother? He was always good to me—spoke kindly.

*He stole our inheritance, my son. We could have lived in a big house, slept on soft beds, walked on carpeted floors; instead, he forced us out into the swamps. Strike! Avenge us! Strike!*

There—his head is split wide open like a melon left too long in the sun. Blood splashes off the walls and drowns the papers in front of him, a red tide of blood. Now I must take my ax and run fast and quiet back to home. Should I wash the dull, once gleaming metal now, or later?

The little town sat baking in the hot summer sun. It was quiet—unnaturally quiet. The people had retreated indoors, not to escape the heat, but from a fear which they frankly admitted and wished to avoid. Somehow, they felt ashamed of their weight of terror and all wished to avoid mutually accusing eyes. It was worse amongst the women. They looked to their husbands for succor, for comfort. They themselves could only sit frustrated, their big work-worn hands dangling helplessly between their knees, their seamed faces mirroring guilt and rage. The only signs of life on the dusty main street were Evans and Mattson sitting under an awning drinking lukewarm beer, the backs of their chairs tilted against the weather-scarred wood.

"This town is petrified with fright," Evans said. "I never remember a Saturday afternoon when this street wasn't crowded with people coming in for supplies—and now look at it. Even the general store is closed."

"That's nothin'," Mattson said. "I've known Walt Randall for over thirty years. Last night I stopped at his house to ask a few questions and almost got blown off the front porch. Everybody's just sittin'—waitin'—with a loaded shotgun. They're not tendin' their crops or nothin'. Just sittin'. It'll be a hard winter unless we can catch us a murderer and get 'em back to work again."

"Matt," Evans said, "I've been doing some thinking for a change. And if it's any comfort to the people, I don't think they have anything to worry about until the next full moon.

Mattson gave a snort of a laugh, "You think that's what triggered these murders off?"

Evans shrugged. "Can you think of any motives for the murders of a prostitute and a judge? We haven't found any. Yet they're definitely connected—the methods and unnecessary bloodletting show that. And there's only one other thing—as far as I can figure—that they have in common, both murders were committed during the full moon."

The sheriff moved his tonnage in the chair, pulling his saturated shirt away from the back of it. "Well," he said, "it sounds crazy to me, but I have to go along with what you say. Got no other choice. Come the next full moon I'll just go out in my car patrollin' the back roads with the lights off."

"I'll accompany you," Evans answered.

They sat quietly, feeling their overheated blood pounding through their veins, patiently waiting for a vagrant breeze that would cool them off. Both turned and idly watched a figure shambling up the street, bent kneed, kicking the dust swirling around his ankles. Big muscled, bare waisted, both hands cradled in the front of his overalls, he lurched rather than walked on his bare feet. A ragged straw hat protected his head from the direct rays of the broiling sun.

"Hello, Willy," Mattson called out softly as the awkward figure lunged by.

He received only a quick, shy nod in return.

"Who's that?" Evans asked.

"Willy Trevelea," the round sheriff answered. "Around here he's called 'Silly Willy.' They may call him that, but he ain't silly. Why, he reads and writes real good. Stutters so bad though he can hardly talk. All the other kids used to pick on him. And he let 'em do it, 'cause he's so strong he was afraid of hurtin' them. Quit school young and doesn't like people much—stays to himself. Understandable, he would. They tell me he still reads a lot."

"Trevelea," Evans rubbed his jaw in recollection. "I remember that name. Seems to me they were wealthy people."

"They've fallen a long ways." Mattson shook his head. "They once owned that place of yours. Willy lives back in the swamp now. That's probably why you've never set eyes on him before. A good boy—right devoted to his ma. She's—"

A slight breeze stirred along the main street. Both men sighed and settled down to enjoy it.

How beautiful the swamp is, Mother, when the moon shines down bright on it. Everything is coated with silver except where the oak and cypress trail jet black behind themselves. They sway, click and creak in the gentle breeze, applauding me. I'm going to enjoy myself tonight. I see, now that you have explained it to me, that we should "not allow a witch to suffer." All along I thought Auntie Bess was a friend of mine, that she always treated me kindly and helped me. Now I realize she cast a curse on me and made me stutter so that everybody would laugh. Yes, I'm going to enjoy myself tonight. I have so much to thank you for, Mother, but I especially thank you for opening my eyes to this witch.

*My good and dutiful son.*

I'm deeper in the swamp now, back where the 'gator and white birds live. The path is hardly anything at all and I must set my feet carefully. How clever of you to send me out during the full moon. Once I pass this soggy patch of ground, sucking at me, waiting for me, I will be able to see Auntie Bess' lean-to. There it is now, and there she sits as always before a little fire, the woven root and animal hide bags stuffed with black magic behind her. They sway and swing in the gentle breeze almost as if with a life of their own. I wonder why I never suspected her of cursing me. She's the witch all right. She doesn't know now what's going to happen to her, does she? She should throw bones and draw pictures in the dirt to try to find out. Why did she curse me? She shouldn't have done that. Ah, she sees me now and is beckoning to me. She thinks I've just come for a visit. She looks with wonder at the pitchfork in my hand and can't figure out why I'm carrying it. Don't look at me like that with your eyes wide, trying to cast another spell. I'll break in your ugly face. Don't you try to drag your ancient bones away from me. There, that'll settle you. Now you're still. All that's left to do is to tie you tight to the ridgepole and plunge my pitchfork into your heart, pin it down so you can never haunt me. The crows will be here by morning. They'll have to fight the 'gators and the ants for what's left. In a year, nobody will ever know you've been here. Now, back to the hard tar road, straight along it for the turn-off to home.

"Don't especially cotton to drivin' these roads without lights," Mattson grunted. "Hell, I'm supposed to uphold the motor vehicle laws and here I go bustin' every one of 'em."

"All for a good cause," Evans said.

"Even if you are a professor, Charley, I still think this idea of yours is way off center."

"Oh, I don't know," Evans said. "Nobody from around here will travel at night and it's the wrong season for tourists. What's more, according to the pattern we should catch our murderer by just staying out when the moon is full."

"It's these roads that are murder," Mattson exclaimed, suddenly swinging the wheel to avoid a hole scoured out by the late summer rains.

"Just take it easy," the professor advised. "We have to stay out most of the night—at least until the moon goes down.

The car crept along, dark and quiet, Mattson pressing his big belly against the wheel, peering intently at the road faintly lit by the moon. Evans kept swinging his head from side to side, watching the edges of the swamp. Both of them were more

worried than they let on. The town was still in a state of panic and one more moonlight murder might very well trigger the fear-struck citizens into some act of violence. Somebody would be picked out as the scapegoat and either be beaten to death or strung up. You wouldn't really be able to blame the town folk; they would just be striking out blindly to protect themselves. And the sheriff knew from past experience that there was little reasoning you could do with a fear-crazed mob. If only the city papers hadn't taken up the story and made such a hullabaloo out of it. They were partially responsible for inflaming the people and would be the first to condemn them.

"Hey!" Evans said suddenly, nudging the round man next to him. "Up there—ahead—on your side of the road.

Mattson peered and slowly braked to an easy stop. "Get out quiet," he whispered. "Don't slam the door. We'll catch him in the lights.

They stood behind the opened doors with drawn guns, watching the shambling figure approach them with its head down. Mattson suddenly flicked on the spot light and Evans pressed down on the button of his flash. The figure reared back, stricken in the sudden brightness like a startled animal.

"It's only Willy Trevelea," Mattson said. "What you doin' out here, Willy?"

"Nn—nnnnnn—nnn," Willy stuttered, his eyes shining wide, quivering and quaking in the light.

"We're not goin' to hurt you, Willy," Mattson said.

Willy stuck the pitchfork he was holding into the ground.

"Perhaps," Evans said to Mattson, "we could make use of the boy. Tell him to be on the lookout for us."

"Make him a deputy?" It was plain Mattson was laughing at the idea. He turned to the still cringing Willy. "Look, Willy, you want to help us find a killer? Anybody you see wanderin' around the swamp, you let us know. You hear?"

"Okay, I know when I'm being needled," Evans said.

"What d'yuh mean? Why Willy covers this swamp like you and me never could. And—

"Sure. Sure. Go on, Willy. Everything's all right. You just go on now."

Without a sound, as though released by Evans' words, Willy slipped away, merged with the night.

As they got back into the car, Evans said, "Really, Sheriff, I'm surprised. That you'd make a poor unfortunate like Willy Trevelea the butt of a joke is just—well, I won't say any more about it."

They rode for a time in silence.

Finally Evans asked. "That boy always wander around that way at night?"

"Sure does." The sheriff had his face close to the windshield, straining to make out the road in the moon-lit dark. "He's a regular swamp creature."

"What do you think, Sheriff?" Evans said, frowning. "Are we being—"

"Damn fools?" the sheriff cut in. "Because we let him go?"

Evans frown deepened.

The sheriff swung the car around.

"That pitchfork. He always carry one?" Evans said as the car straightened out to take them back up the road.

The sheriff didn't answer. It was very quiet in the car until the brakes squealed as Matt brought it to a sharp stop at the point where Willy had left the pitchfork. They drew its prongs from the earth and saw the blood stains.

"Come on," the sheriff said, cursing softly at himself. They went back to the shack in which Willy lived. They entered it with caution, both men with guns drawn. But it was empty. Its neatness and cleanliness made it appear all the more deserted. Even the lamp chimney was shining.

Evans thumbed through a notebook that lay open on the table. What he read caused an amazed whistle.

"Look at this, Matt. Talk about your plans for murder. Even the dates when to commit the crimes. This tells the boy just how to do them and why. Julia's in here—the judge—at least three or four more."

"Yeah," Mattson said, lifting the leaves of a three year calendar and studying the writing in them. "His ma—this calendar tells him when he should look in the book."

Evans stared uncomprehendingly for a moment, then returned to the pages of the notebook. "Hey!" he shouted suddenly. "You made it, too. Listen to this, 'It was Sheriff Mattson who forced us out of our ancestral home and had it sold to carpetbaggers. He always hated and envied us because we are so much better born—' There's a whole lot more here, Matt, about you. Gives me a start. Just the idea that I've been thinking of selling the old homestead."

"Bring all that along." Mattson sighed. "It's all evidence, but I doubt if it'll ever be used against the boy. He's not really responsible. Probably they'll commit him for life."

"You mean his mother plotted all these murders?" Evans asked.

"That's right."

Evans shook his head. "I'll enjoy meeting her. Any woman that could take her boy and—"

"You won't be seeing his ma," Mattson said softly, lightly.

"She's been dead for over a year."

# togetherness

*His search began slowly, gradually. All at once, he found himself studying every blind man he met on the street . . .*

*A Novelette*

**by**
**AARON MARC STEIN**

MAYBE it was because blood is thicker than water and, when a kid's sweating out his living washing dishes in a Tenth Avenue beanery, he can use anything, so long as it's a sharp change from water. More likely it was because young Bill Tarr had nobody and this state of having nobody came on him too abruptly. He never quite learned how to deal with it.

The way he had it before—that wasn't anything he could look back to with sentimental regret. It was, however, all he'd ever known. There was his old lady although he early learned not to call her that. If you took a close look at the kid you could see that little line of white in his upper lip. That was from a broken tooth that cut clean through the one time she heard him call her his old lady. Of course, it wasn't the only time she slapped him in the mouth but it was the only time she swung on him quite that hard.

He'd been a little kid then and the only way he knew that he'd ever had a father was because there was a hook alongside the kitchen door and on it hung a souvenir of the old man. She kept reminding him of it and the kid never had any way of knowing whether he remembered it at all on his own or if it was just that he remembered what she kept telling him.

"You'll be in the pen before you start shaving,"

she'd say. "With the bad blood you've got in you and needing a man's firm hand on you that you don't get, it won't be no fault of mine what'll become of you. If your father was here, he'd take that strap to you like he used to and that would straighten you up for a while."

That went back as far as he could remember, her telling him that. Furthermore she kept on saying it right down to the end, even after it got to be one worry she didn't have. This part of it the kid had no trouble remembering. There had always been the men. He learned to take little notice of them. By the time he was about eight years old, he learned to move fast and many times when she set herself to give him a slap in the mouth he could duck away from it and shoot out of the house. Mostly if he stayed away a couple of hours she would forget about it.

It was about that time that she took to telling the men she'd bring home with her of her worries over the boy, how he was running wild all the time and she just a woman who couldn't begin to handle a big, strong boy like him, and his father never around to take the pants off him the way he needed. A lot of them would just tell her to shut up. They weren't around with the idea of being a father to anybody. There were some, however, who were of a more obliging bent, always ready to help the little lady with her responsibilities. They would reach the strap down from the hook beside the door and the kid never went too long feeling fatherless.

He always had, on the other hand, a warm bed and enough to eat. He always had shoes for his feet and that bit of change for his pocket. By and large, also, his old lady was fun and he had his share of good times. Friends he had never known. There were other kids and when they would be out kicking a ball around, he would be there with them; but that was all. He never went home with them. He never brought anyone home with him. The other kids would have their special friends, but young Bill never knew quite what it meant. He got along well enough, but he never had the trick of intimacy. It was just that he had to belong somewhere, but there was never anyone to teach him to expect more than the least, small bit of belonging.

He had no reason to expect anything of his old man. So far as his own memory went, the kid saw his father only the one time and even then it wasn't much. Certainly there was no fatherly gesture, no moment of warmth. Several of the men who had come and gone over the years should have been more memorable, but he did have this memory and for six years it held clear and sharp.

He was about ten that time the old man turned up. The kid came in off the street and he was there. Another man, but this one with a face young Bill could never forget. He had never seen a face like that, all sundarkened except around the eyes. The eyes may not have been so remarkably cold and hard as they seemed to the boy. It may only have been that the kid noticed them more because they were so sharply picked out from the man's face, isolated as they were by their surrounding discs of dead-white skin.

## 2.

The man also had a tattoo. He was sitting there with his shirt off, taking his comfort, and the tattoo was on his left arm. It was a big one, running from shoulder to elbow, and it wasn't like any tattoo the kid had ever seen before—no heart, no mom, no babe, no babe's name. It was a knife, a blue knife entwined with red flowers. On anyone else that tattoo would have held the kid bemused, but now, although he did study it carefully, his eyes would dart back to look again and again at the discs of white skin around the man's eyes. They were something the like of which he had never seen before.

"The kid?" the man asked, flicking a quick glance over young Bill. "What you been keeping him around for?"

"That all you've got to say about him?"

"It is the kid?" the man asked again.

"That's him," she said.

The man turned away. "Tell him to get lost," he told her.

"You're not going to be here that long. You can stand him."

The man brought a dollar out of his pocket. He wadded the bill in his hand and flipped it toward the kid.

"Go to the movies or something. Go on. Get lost."

When the kid came back to the house that night, there was nobody there and weeks went by before either of them spoke of the man with the white skin around his eyes. Then she brought it up.

"Your father," she said, as though some way the kid should have known.

"What makes his eyes white like that?"

"I don't want to talk about it," she said. "It gives me the creeps."

It was some time later that she did talk about it. The old man had come down from New York with ideas that maybe she'd go back with him. He'd served some time, but he had that behind him and he'd worked up a routine that was going fine. He was a blind man now—black glasses, white stick, tap-tapping along the pavements. People helped him in and out of subway cars. People helped him across streets. He watched from behind his glasses and he picked his people. Sometimes he didn't have to work more than once in a couple of weeks. The nearest he ever came to having a bad day was when he might have a run of wallets that were fat with

one-dollar bills or, worse than that, with identification trash.

The kid was fascinated. The next time he was alone in the house, he tried it out just to see how it would feel. He found a stick and, closing his eyes, he was tap-tapping around the house. The first he knew she was there was when she snatched the stick out of his hand and, screaming at him, belabored him across the shoulders with it. It was only when the stick broke that she stopped.

It wasn't that the kid was playing pickpocket that bothered her. She often caught him at her purse and she would be angry but not with this wild, panicky anger. That had come because he had been playing at mutilation. Mutilation frightened and sickened her and the fact that it was only pretended mutilation made no difference.

"Him and his black glasses," she said. "Mark my words. One day he'll be struck blind for it. Mark my words."

After that they never spoke of it any more and, when his old man would be mentioned, it would again be only in the old pattern of reference to the strap on the hook beside the door. The kid, however, never forgot, and often he would stand in front of a mirror studying his own face and remembering the man with the skin so white around his eyes. After a couple of years it began to seem to him that his own face was starting to take on those remembered contours.

When he was past thirteen she took to remarking on his resemblance to his old man and by then he had really grown too big and too husky for her to handle. That year it became her obsession. She was always talking about him to her various men and the strap was working overtime.

In the space of the one year he ran away three separate times, but each time he would try it for a couple of days and then he would come back, never quite knowing what brought him back, never really glad to be home again. It just seemed the only place to be and it continued to seem that even as he would grow increasingly fed up.

Whatever bond there was between the kid and his old lady was certainly of the thinnest, but it was there and it never occurred to the kid to question its quality or to ask for better. It was the only kind of belonging he had ever known. It was that or nothing and the boy had to have something.

The first time he ran away, there was a big fuss, but not really because he had run off. That time there was something else. While he was gone, he had himself tattooed. He'd been thinking of it for some time but he'd never seen a design he'd wanted enough. This time he saw it and that was the first he knew he was looking for this one.

He came home with it and as soon as she saw him with his shirt off, she started screaming.

"You want to be like him," she raged. "Like him in everything. Him, always coming up with a knife in his hand and having it always on him like that so I'd be reminded between times."

The kid wondered what she was yelling about. There had been too many times when some man had made her mad and the kid had seen her grab for a knife. Who was she to talk? Many of the men that would come and then they would stop coming —it would be like that before they stopped. There would be that last time when the man would have to slap the knife out of her hand. The kid wondered, but he was smart enough to keep his shirt on after that.

3.

The other times he ran away nothing happened. He'd come back and they'd just go on as they had before.

The kid kept telling himself that one of these times he wouldn't come back, but that was only a way of thinking. He didn't make any plans for it. Then there was the time when he had been back a couple of weeks and they had been pretty good weeks for the way it was going that year.

She had very little time for him and, when he saw her, she always was strained and irritable, but she'd been having other problems and she hadn't been bothering about him. He did notice that it was always the one man day after day, but two weeks wasn't such a long time that it would begin to seem especially strange. There had been other times when a single man had monopolized her for that long or longer and, since this man was one who never gave the kid so much as a look, it suited young Bill to have it stay that way.

He hadn't gone back to school that last time he came home and she hadn't turned her mind to sending him back. He had his working papers. She had gotten him those for a vacation job during the summer that was just gone and he'd been thinking of going to work. He'd done nothing about it, though.

That was the way it was the afternoon he came in to pull a coke or a beer off the ice. It was completely quiet and, sucking on his beer, he wandered out to her room just on the chance that she had left her purse around when she'd gone out. He had some money on him but it wasn't going to last forever and, even though he had been thinking of going to work, he just might not and it never hurt to lay a little something by for the future.

Coming into the room, he saw the man on the bed and it hit him that there was something about the man that didn't look right. He set the beer down beside the door and silently he crossed the room to the bed. That he had learned well over the years. He knew how to move quite soundlessly.

The man was dead. The kid saw the blood and the knife and he knew at once what must have happened. He was, nevertheless, somewhat astonished that it should have happened. So many times

one man or another had slapped the knife out of her hand. The kid had never visualized the possibility that one day there would be a man who wouldn't be that quick or that effective. The closet door was standing open and he could see that the suitcase was out of it and most of her clothes. He didn't bother to look around for her purse. He knew she would have taken that with her, but just on the chance he did go through the man's pockets. That wasn't any good. She'd already rolled the man.

The kid went out of the room, kicking the half emptied beer over as he passed. He went through the kitchen and out the kitchen door. As he went over the fences and across the yards to come out on the avenue along the quiet stretch he'd always used when he was running away, he might have wondered a bit which way she'd gone, but neither then nor afterward did it ever enter his head that he might have looked for her. He was leaving home just as he'd done before and, if before he had come back for no reason except that it was there, this time he went knowing that it wasn't there any more. This time he wouldn't be coming back.

He may have gone to New York that night because the lift he picked up happened to have headed him that way. He may have thought of it from the first because he was a kid of fourteen and he had to lose himself and even a big kid of fourteen can't do that too easily. New York was the big place and for losing oneself the big place is always better than a small one. It is almost certain that his choice of New York was not in any way determined by the fact that, so far as he could know, his father was there.

The idea of being in some place where he belonged or of being with someone to whom he belonged never shaped itself in the boy's mind to such a form as he would be able to recognize for what it was. It was, of course, some such idea that had been bringing him back to his old lady each time he ran away but, even when he would be going back, it was never anything he had thought out. He would just be following an urge; and, since he had never learned to question his urges, he never had any occasion for trying to understand them either. At the moment of running away, furthermore, that urge would be dormant. When he headed for New York that night, it didn't seem to him to be too much different from any of the other times he had run away.

In any event, he made it to New York and he found a job and a room and he did well enough. The job wasn't much good, but he switched to another and over the two years he was on his own he had a lot of jobs. The one in the beanery wasn't much better than the others had been, but he was now sixteen and big enough and tough enough to look a lot older than that and, therefore, at the beanery he had been able to hit out for his rights. He knew that the waiters were supposed to cut him in on their tips and, when he had a hunch that they might be chiseling on him, he would wait until he was washing up after the cook before he talked about it. He'd found that he never had to say much if he said it with a cleaver or even with a paring knife in his hand.

He'd started out by being close-mouthed and keeping to himself. Wherever it was, if somebody would start talking to him and asking questions, it didn't matter that they were friendly questions. The kid always moved on. He'd been at the beanery longer than any other place because the owner was a Greek and everybody else who worked there was Greek. The English they talked wasn't much more than business English. For conversation they gabbled at each other in their own language and they left the kid alone. There weren't any questions.

He went to the movies a lot and he went to the ball games. He thought more and more of picking up with a girl and, when he tried it, it was all right only as long as they were out in the street. As soon as it came to going some place inside with them, he'd find himself sheering off. It wasn't a sentimental thing like remembering his old lady. It was the man he would remember and the complete quiet of the house that afternoon and the knife and the blood.

He had started shaving and when he would be lathering up—even though it wasn't at all the same thing since it was the lather that was white and the unlathered skin around his eyes that showed darker —he was reminded each time that he was growing to look more and more like his old man.

4.

So there it was. As I said, it may have been because blood is thicker than water or it may have been because he had nobody and, even though that was the way he wanted it and he'd had all of two years to get used to it, he hadn't gotten used to it. Whatever his reason, though, he did begin looking for his old man.

He did his looking without expecting much just as in the old days, when he would run away, he would always come home again even though he came home without expecting much. He had this urge to belong somewhere, to belong to someone, even though all the belonging he had known had never been much good to him.

There was nothing systematic about the way he looked. He never even thought to check the telephone book to see if there was a William Tarr listed. It was just something that seemed to creep up on him. It began when he saw a blind man in the street one day. He noticed the dark glasses and the white stick and he heard the tapping. He turned back to pass the man again so that he could look hard into the man's face. It was an old man, inches

too short, pounds too slight, completely unlike.

Then, without half knowing he was doing it, wherever he went, he was watching for blind men. They were surprisingly numerous, he discovered, and often he would follow one of them for a while even though it was a man who looked nothing like his father. He always had this curiosity to know whether these blind men were genuine.

One day he recognized the fact that he was really looking. Even though his work day didn't start until eleven he took to getting up early so he could ride the subway during the morning rush hour. He wouldn't go anywhere, just ride the trains through the couple of hours when they would be packed most tightly, getting on and off at the most crowded stations.

On his off days he would try loitering in the busiest parts of town, watching those intersections where the pedestrians crossed in droves against the heaviest traffic and where, on gaining the opposite curb they would be buffeted by the eddying crowds that surged around the corner.

One evening on Eighth Avenue at the Madison Square Garden corner he saw his old man. The kid looked and he had to look again. He had almost missed him. The picture of the face with the white skin around the eyes had fixed itself so deeply in his mind that he had actually been looking for those discs of white and, on first sight, the dark glasses had thrown him off completely. On the second look, the kid was certain and, grinning, he stepped up alongside the man where he stood at the curb, tapping tentatively with his white stick.

Deliberately the kid placed himself so that the pocket where he kept his money would be within the blind man's reach, but he took a firm grasp on the blind man's arm. He was going to see how his old man worked it. They crossed the avenue and the kid walked close so that the roll he was carrying in his pants pocket pressed against his old man's thigh. They reached the curb and he started to say, "Step up."

Before he had the words out, however, his blind man had run his foot against the curb, pretending to trip. The white stick clattered to the pavement and the man's arm wrenched in the kid's grasp. Using both hands, ostensibly to save himself from falling, the man caught at the kid. The man's hands grasped scrabbling just at the kid's hips. The boy turned fast and slapped the man's hand away.

"Not this time, Pop," he said softly. "Not in the family."

He bent down and retrieved the stick.

"Sorry," the man said. "You did warn me about the curb. I'm not often clumsy like that."

"We'll go where I can buy you a drink."

"No, young man. Thank you very much. I'll be all right now."

The kid reached for his arm. "Okay, Pop," he said. "She told me that one time I saw you."

The man turned the two black discs of the glasses straight at him. "I don't know what your game is, young fellow," he said. "I may be blind, but I can take care of myself. I don't want any trouble with you. Go on, now, get lost."

He brought up the hand that had the stick in it and slammed it against the kid's belly. The way he did it, it looked only as though he were pushing the kid off, but that wasn't the way it felt. There was more steam behind it than showed to the eye and the wrist was turned so that there was more stick in the blow than there was hand. The kid folded for a moment and in that moment the man slipped into the crowd.

## 5.

Recovering, the kid felt of his pocket. His roll was still there. He pushed through the crowd and caught up with his blind man, but this time he fell in behind him. The man picked another street crossing and waited there. The kid watched. This time the man picked his victim, a young woman with a big diamond on her finger and one of those purses that hung from her shoulder and slapped against her side. It was easy. He didn't have to trip her or to paw her. He crossed slowly and timidly and all the way across she talked to him, reassuring him. If the kid hadn't been looking for it, even where he was, directly behind them, he would never have seen the purse opened, the hand dipped in, the billfold lifted out, and the final touch of artistry—the clasp of the purse refastened.

Tenaciously the kid followed until the man turned off the crowded streets into a quieter part of town. Here, having less fear of losing the man, he dropped back to follow at a more cautious distance. Finally the man went up the steps of a house and went in. The kid waited a few minutes before he followed. He studied the bells and he found the name. W. Tarr. He was happily surprised. His old man could have changed his name a dozen times in the years since the kid had been named for him. The bell was marked 2B.

The kid rang and started up the stairs to the second floor. The man was up there, his back against the door of 2B, waiting at the top of the stairs. He had taken his shirt off and the kid, seeing the tattoo of the knife with the flowers twined around it, remembered his own. He went up the stairs slowly, pulling out of his coat and then taking his shirt off, as he climbed. He had his coat and shirt hanging over his arm as he came to the top of the stairs. The man hadn't moved.

He just waited till the kid reached him, holding impassive behind the dark glasses, wearing a fixed look of mild questioning, that look of concentrated listening you expect in the faces of the blind. The kid looked at the heavily muscled arms and shoul-

ders and the big chest, recognizing the mold in which he had seen himself growing. He was waiting for the man to speak and the man was waiting for him. Finally the man did speak.

"Who are you?" he said. "What do you want? I know you're there. I can hear you. What do you want with me?"

"Okay, Pop. We're alone now. You can take the glasses off. I don't want a damn thing, only to say hello."

"Oh, it's you. You're the young fellow who bothered me on Eighth Avenue. I'm giving you thirty seconds to go down those stairs and get out of here before I kick your teeth in."

"That other time you threw me a buck and told me to get lost."

"A hold up? You picked the wrong man for it. Get out of here."

The kid swung. Maybe he meant to drive the fist home and maybe he would have stopped it that bare inch short of the man's face. Either way, it stopped. The man had him by the wrist and a quick twist of the man's hand sent hot pain stabbing the length of the kid's arm to explode in his shoulder. The kid was forced to his knees.

"You saw it," the kid gasped. "I'm right. You can see. You know me, all right."

"I heard it," the man snarled. "I hear you move. I even hear your breathing. Even when you think you're holding it, I hear it."

"All right," the kid answered. "So you don't want to say hello. So all right. The hell with you. I don't need you."

The man still had him by the wrist. Now with his free hand he slapped the kid. He landed the flat of his hand hard against the kid's mouth and then, as though on the return, came right back with the back of his hand slamming into the kid's lips. The boy lunged upward, disregarding the pain in his twisted arm. The man was ready for him. He let go and, as the kid came surging at him, he brought his foot up and drove his heel against the kid's chin. The boy crashed down the flight of stairs and, a moment after he hit the bottom, he heard the door on the floor above slam shut.

He lay quite still for a couple of moments until the breath came back into him and then carefully he felt of his jaw and tried out his arms and legs. He hurt in more places than he could count but he decided that he was all right. He went up the stairs to pick up his shirt and coat. He put them on and carefully buttoned his shirt and tucked the shirt tails in before he went out of the building and stationed himself in a dark doorway across the street.

He waited a long time, till well after midnight, and he never asked himself why he was waiting. When he saw his father come out and head toward the avenue, he followed cautiously. He had a long walk, but eventually the man again waited at the curb and again picked his victim. This time it was a man and, when they started across the street, the kid was again at their heels. Nothing happened until they had reached the far curb and then it was the technique his old man had tried on him. His old man tripped, dropped his stick, and grabbed at his victim.

The kid was ready for that. He caught hold of his father from behind, bringing his hands in under the man's arms. With a surge of exultation, he knew he was doing it nicely. Ostensibly he was saving the blind man from a fall. Actually he had neatly lifted the man's hand out of reach of the pocket into which it had been about to dip.

Mumbling his thanks without even turning his head, the blind man concentrated on his victim. His stick was restored to him, but he stood shaking and irresolute at the corner. The man who had helped him across was concerned for him and this time there were no assurances that he would be all right. He asked if the man could see him to his door. Actually, as the kid knew, it was a long way to that door, but his old man was telling his benefactor that it was only down the street. With the man helping him, he started down the street, away from the avenue lights.

Once more the kid followed but once more he had to drop back to a careful distance. He was nowhere near, therefore, when they stopped. The man had the kid's father by the arm and he began to shout for the police. As the kid started running toward the two men, he caught the flash of a knife. Even as he ran, he could see them struggle and he could see the gleam of the knife in his father's hand. He saw the other man twist and lunge and he saw his father go down.

## 6.

When he caught up with them, his father was down. The knife lay on the pavement alongside his slack hand and the other man was stooping over him. The kid had the feeling that he had been there before. It might have been because it was something like all those times with the old lady when she had picked up a knife and one man or another had slapped it out of her hand; but this was his old man and he was lying completely still. The man who was stooped over him turned and looked up at the kid.

"I think he's dead," he said. "He was after my wallet and, when I caught him at it, he pulled a knife on me. I didn't mean to kill him. All I wanted was to get away from the knife, but I think he's dead."

The kid kicked out and caught the man low. With a bubbling sort of sob, the man folded and the kid grabbed a handful of the man's coat and

pulled him up. Holding him there and measuring him, the kid smashed his fist into the side of the man's jaw. The man crumpled.

The kid dropped to one knee beside his father. The glasses had been knocked off and the eyes looked like holes in the perfect discs of white skin that circled them. They weren't hard or cold now. They were just blank. The kid snatched up the knife and slid it into his pocket. He was back on his feet by the time the squad car pulled up.

The other man had begun to stir and the cops pulled him to his feet. They held the man at the curb and they waited for him while he was sick. In the intervals, however, he was gasping out his story. He'd helped the blind man across the street, but he hadn't known the man wasn't blind at all or, even if he was, he was a crook anyway. He'd been helping this crook and then he caught the crook when he was trying to pick his pocket and, when he fought that off and yelled for the cops, the crook pulled a knife on him.

"I fought him off. I think he's dead."

"He's dead all right," one of the cops said. "Where's the knife?"

The other cop interrupted. "We'll find it here somewhere," he said. "It figures. You know who this is? It's Bill Tarr."

"Bill Tarr? I've heard of him. I didn't know he was operating again."

"Looks like he was."

A crowd had gathered. It was only a small crowd, but the kid had slipped back into it. He was standing there, listening. Then he heard the man begin to remember that there had been someone else, someone who had come up from nowhere right after he had fought off his blind man.

A couple of men came up and listened for a moment or two and then moved on. Going along casually, the kid moved with them. He was conscious of someone behind him, someone who was following and keeping close. He wanted to turn his head to look but he forced himself to look straight ahead and walk slowly. Then he heard the slamming of a car door behind him. He did turn and look then. There was the car at the curb and one of the biggest men he had ever seen was settling himself behind the wheel. The kid walked to the corner and he wasn't allowing himself to hurry his steps even a little. The car passed him and rolled down to the corner where it was stopped by the lights. That was all right. It made him feel better. The car was still there, waiting for the lights, when the kid reached the corner and turned into the avenue. There he saw a bus and he ran for it. He made it and swung aboard. He rode it for a long time and, when it came to its last stop, the driver had to tell him it was the end of the line.

He roused himself and got off. He was in a part of town he had never known. There was the river and he had no way of knowing which one it was, and up ahead loomed a big bridge. He started to run but remembered that running might look funny. He forced himself to walk until he hit a dark place and there he did run. He ran toward the bridge and found the footwalk. He started over the bridge. He walked close to the rail and every few steps he would look down to see if he was over the water yet. He had expected to be over the water almost immediately, but it was a long walk before he could look down and see the glinting of the river far below.

## 7.

Leaning over the rail, he took the knife from his pocket. Without even stopping to look at it, he threw it hard. It sailed in a wide, glinting arc as long as the bridge lights held it and then it disappeared. The kid hung over the rail, waiting to hear the splash of it when it would hit the water, but he heard nothing. It was too far away. He hung there, waiting, even though he knew that it couldn't take that long to fall the distance. He had counted on the splash to assure him that he was rid of it and there was something in the silence of its disappearance that he found frightening.

When the hand came down on his shoulder and spun him around, he half expected the knife would be in it. It wasn't, but it was the big man he had last seen in the car at that corner downtown. It was this big man who now had the grip on the boy's shoulder. As the kid came around, the man crowded in and rammed him hard against the rail.

"Okay, slob," the man said, his voice coming in a silky murmur. "What was that for?"

"Nothing," the kid snarled. "You let me alone. I ain't done nothing."

With careful deliberation the man delivered a searing kick to the kid's shin.

"You ain't done nothing," he mimicked. "With a knife, you ain't done nothing. I've half a mind to call the cops."

"Let me alone. Let me go."

"Nasty, big man molesting the little boy. Why don't you yell for the cops?"

"Look, Mister, honest. I ain't done nothing. I found this knife. I figured I didn't want it. I threw it away. Nothing. I just wanted to hear it splash."

"Yeah, when I was following you from the bus, I could tell then it was all you wanted, to hear a splash. Wise up, slob. What do you take me for?"

"I found it. I only found it."

"I know where you found it. Even back there when you were walking so casual-like away from the cops, I knew then all you wanted was to hear a splash. Then the minute you were around the corner, the way you took off on the run, I said to myself then that there was a fellow, all he wanted

was to hear a splash. It showed all over you."

"You're crazy. I don't know what you're talking about."

Holding the kid pinned against the rail, the man brought his knee up and pressed it into the boy's groin. He pressed only hard enough to make the sickening weakness rise up in the kid till it held steady at the kid's throat. It was nicely calculated to hang the kid just short of pain and to hold him in the sharpest awareness of just how closely pain hovered, of just how effortlessly it could be brought in.

"You lie to me some more," the man said, "and I might kick your tail from here to Jersey and back here again."

The kid said nothing. The man started walking him. They were going the way the kid had come but every couple of paces the man would pause and crowd him back against the rail. On each of these stops he would take careful aim and kick the boy. One time it would be one ankle, the next time the other. One time a shin, the next time the other shin.

"This isn't anything," he said. "This is just till I can get you some place when I can really work you over right. You heard me, slob? This isn't anything to what you get unless you make me feel better about you first."

They came off the bridge and the man hustled him to his car. He had parked it near the bridge approach, just beyond the end of the bus route. He pulled the door open and told the kid to get in. The kid tried to dodge out from between the man and the car. The man caught him and kicked him hard. That was a kick that crumpled the kid and the man lifted him and rammed him into the car seat. Coming in after the boy, the man used the weight of his body to drive the kid across the seat until the kid fetched up against the far door.

A squad car drew up alongside. One of the cops leaned out.

"What's your trouble, Mister? What's going on?"

"Nothing, officer, thank you. Nothing I can't handle. Me, I've got old-fashioned ideas about what time of night kids should be home and off the streets, but there's no trouble, Officer. Not till I get him home and haul the pants off him there won't be. Then I'll show him trouble."

The cops laughed. "Right, Mister. Give him hell, Mister."

They pulled away. The man set the car going.

"You were all right then," he said. "You're learning fast."

The kid had had his arm against the door handle, figuring that he might flip it up and jump for it as soon as the cops were gone. The few words of almost-praise slowed him up, but he did try putting a little pressure on the handle. He couldn't move it. He knew what was wrong. The lock was on and he would have to bring his hand up to release it. He knew he could never do that without the man seeing him. He stole a look at the man, trying to hate him, but his mind wouldn't stay on it.

His mind wouldn't do anything beyond telling him that, if the man hadn't been ready to speak when the cops had come along, it would have been his neck and it would have been knives to explain all the way back, the knife he had thrown off the bridge, the knife he had left on the bed, the knife tatto on his old man's arm, the one just like it the kid had under his own shirt, all those Greeks who would remember how he had never talked to them unless it was when he'd had a knife in his hand.

"What do you want with me?" the kid asked.

## 8

"That depends. It all rides on how quick you're going to be ready to be a good boy and do like I tell you. Since it's me or the cops, you'll be smart to string along with me. But I don't have to tell you that. You didn't open your yap back there."

He dropped his hand on the kid's knee and, as he talked, the man squeezed the boy's thigh. It was a friendly squeeze, a sort of rough caress that told the kid that the man could hurt him any time he wanted to do it, but that the kid might have the hope that he wouldn't want to do it.

"What do you want with me?" the kid asked again.

"There's this all-night coffee pot I've been watching. Just the one old man behind the counter and he gets a big play for a while after the last movies let out. He's had that. Now he doesn't do a thing for maybe another hour when he'll begin to get the night-shift bus jockeys coming off. You say the word and we'll stop there before I take you home."

"Stop there for what?"

"Not for coffee."

"Stickup?"

"You say the word. I'm in no particular hurry. If you're not ready for it tonight, he'll be there just the same tomorrow night, and by tomorrow night I'll have you ready. It's all the same to me. I take the pants off you or I don't. You say the word, kid. It's your tail."

"Why me?"

"Because you need me. I can talk to cops. You can't. Put your hand in my pocket, the pocket near you."

The kid did as he was told. His hand found the automatic. He brought it out. The man told him how simple it would be. The man would park out front. The kid would go in and order a cup of coffee. The old man would turn away to draw it. The kid would have the gun on him when he turned back.

The kid slipped his finger through the trigger guard.

"Is it loaded?" he asked.

The man laughed. "So you can shoot me?" he said. "No, it isn't loaded. You're not going to shoot anybody. You just go in and get the dough and come back to me with it. It doesn't have to be loaded as long as nobody knows it isn't, nobody but you and me. What do you say? Tonight? Tomorrow night? The first night you can walk again?"

He pulled up to the curb. The light from the coffee pot splashed across the sidewalk. The kid could see the old man behind the counter. He was alone, dozing.

"This the place" he asked.

"He's insured. He'll give down like a cow gives milk."

The kid reached over and released the lock. He flipped the door handle up.

"Okay," he said, as he started out of the car. "I'll only be a minute. See you."

The man leaned over and with his fist he playfully cuffed the kid's shoulder.

"That's my boy," he said. "That's my boy."

The kid grinned at him and, fingering the gun in his pocket, turned and walked into the coffee pot.

## *Female of the Species*

O. L. Voorhees, 45, of Hobbs, N. Mex., was arrested after he left the scene of a three car accident. His car struck another automobile, causing it to crash into a third car. Voorhees explained that he didn't stop because he wanted to avoid getting into an argument with a woman driver in one of the cars.

## *Vanishing Act*

A man told Jamestown, N. Y., police that he padlocked his motor boat to a tree. When he returned later both the motorboat and the tree were gone.

## *Business as Usual*

An outside work permit for Arthur K. Robinson, serving 30 days in the Akron, Ohio, workhouse for possession of lottery slips, was revoked by Judge Abner Zook. Authorities discovered that Robinson was using his free time to sell more lottery tickets.

## *Burglary in the Nude*

Nineteen counts of breaking and entering were filed against Oswald Cooper, Jr., 20, in Woodstock, Va., after Shenandoah County Sheriff's officers apprehended Cooper driving a stolen pickup truck in the nude. Sheriff Garland Weaver identified Cooper as the prowler known locally as the "nudist burglar." Cooper told officers that he operated in his birthday clothes "to avoid identification."

## *Canine Criminal*

In Chester, Pa., Mrs. Betty Partridge gave the manager a pack of cigarettes in a super-market and told him it had been shoplifted by a dog. Skeptical, the manager turned toward the cigarette counter and saw the dog trotting back for another pack. He chased the dog from the store.

## *Two Way Getaway*

A pair of bandits in Houston, Tex., robbed Captain John's Restaurant. Witnesses told police that after the hold-up, the robbers ran from the restaurant, jumped into separate cars and roared off in opposite directions.

# THE SPINNER

*The man had made offensive calls to women all over town, so Elsa hung up when he called* her. *But then she began to think about it . . .*

**by AVRAM DAVIDSON**

DR. ELSA ANDERS walked in from her laboratory as a queen might from the throne room. The telephone's brash ring had disturbed her while she was examining through a magnifying-glass the web spun by a South American spider rarely seen in this country. Elsa was a tall, slim woman and despite the long hours bent over microscopes there was no sag to her body. She carried her firm breasts proudly.

Who would be calling her? She knew few people, had fewer friends. The voice at the other end was a man's. He greeted her by name.

"Yes?" she asked, in her clear, pleasant contralto.

"Is your husband in?" the man asked. He had a rather odd-sounding voice.

"Oh, I'm afraid you've got the wrong number," Elsa said, amused. *She* married?

The man then asked, very calmly, "Can I come over now and—"

He finished his request with two words Dr. Elsa

Anders had not heard addressed to her in her entire life. But of course she knew what he meant. Chaste as she was, she hadn't been raised in a vacuum.

"I know who you are," she said, after the momentary shock of his coarse proposal had gone. "I'd heard that someone has been calling up women in town and making obscene suggestions to them. You're sick, Mister. You should consult a doctor."

The man said, "Well, *you*'re a doctor. I'll come over and consult *you*." He snickered. She heard him swallow.

"*I* am an arachnidologist," Elsa said. "*You* require a psychiatrist."

The man uttered another short, nasty word. Then: "How about it, doll?" he asked. "It'll be fun for both of us. You got no husband, I got no wife."

"Certainly not," Elsa said, crisply. As she put the receiver back on its cradle she heard the voice say, "*I* am an arachnidologist," Elsa said. "*You* require clicked her tongue in annoyance. She didn't want the man—fool or degenerate or madman, whatever he was—to call again. Not that she was morally outraged; far from that. In the cool, calm world which she inhabited there was no such conception as morality or immorality. But telephone calls were distracting. She didn't like to be distracted.

That was why she lived alone in this big house on the quiet back street. She was thirty-five years old, and even twenty years ago she had known that her life was to be in science. Her parents were both dead and had left her with sufficient money. She had no other family. The university where she had gotten her degrees had asked her to stay on. But she had her own laboratory in the house and no one could bother or disturb her.

At least no one *had*—until now.

Passing through the hall on her way back to the lab she went by the full-length mirror. Automatically she reached out a finger to check it for dust. Claire, the part-time maid, was often careless. There was no dust, but Elsa remained in front of the glass. She studied herself.

She wasn't ugly, certainly. Pretty? Nothing so shallow as that. Without vanity, but with scientific exactness, Dr. Elsa decided that she might well be described as "handsome"—not a phrase usually applied to women these days.

Strange, she mused, that no man's lips had ever touched her mouth. It was a good mouth, full and soft, and red despite the absence of make-up. And it was strange, too, that no man's hands had ever caressed those high, proud breasts. But why was she thinking of all this *now*? With an impatient exclamation Elsa went into the laboratory.

The South American spiders which she had been examining when the phone rang were remarkable for several reasons. For one thing, at the hubs in their webs they made six or seven spiral turns, instead of the usual four or five, to hold the criss-crossed spans of thread together. And they had four pairs of spinnerets near the end of their bag-like bellies on the bottom. The *chelicerae,* or fangs with which they tore their prey, were unusually long and claw-like.

Some people—*most* people—would have thought them ugly, horrible . . . but not Dr. Elsa Anders. The idea of beauty, like the idea of morality, was one which did not enter into her tight little world of science. The "class" of *Arachnida* includes mites, ticks, daddy-long-legs, scorpions, and spiders. These last make up the "order" of *Araneida*. The different species number more than—

A breeze blew in the open window from the garden, bringing with it the scent of the flowers. Suddenly Elsa started, cried, *"Oh!"* She whirled around.

No one was there. "How silly of me," she murmured, and smiled. It had been only the breeze—but for a moment she had thought it was a man's finger, stroking—lightly, oh, so lightly—the skin along the inside of her legs.

She turned again to the microscope. Then she turned away from it, impatiently. What could have put such an odd thought into her mind? Certainly, never in her life had a man's fingers *ever* done such a thing. What could have given her such an idea? What?

Then she understood, and the blood rushed to her face. She muttered her disgust. It had been *him* —that creature, that voice on the telephone, with his foul suggestion. It was the man's obscene murmuring which had caused these unclean fantasies . . . But then, calm and cool, her rational mind took over from her emotions. Why "foul"? Why "unclean"? It was only the rule of nature for the male to desire the female. It was perfectly natural.

*But was it not equally natural for the female to desire the male?*

Yes, she admitted to herself. Yes, of course it was natural. Only she herself never had.

The tall clock in the hall chimed the hour. It was ten o'clock. And it was Wednesday. That meant she had to go to the bank. Methodically, Dr. Elsa Anders closed and latched the windows. She made certain that the gas was off, that no faucets were leaking. Then she put on her hat—a "sensible" hat it was, nothing silly—took up her purse and left the house, rattling the door-knob to be quite sure the lock was on.

As a rule Elsa never noticed the faces of the people on the streetcar. Today she found herself scanning them all. It was almost as if she were looking for something . . . *what* something? It was there in her mind, if she could only find it, bring it up to the surface and examine it. And, meanwhile, as she wondered, her eyes went from face to face.

And not *just* the face. Bodies as well.

Take that young man opposite, the one with the blonde crew-cut and the cheerful sun-browned face

and arms. Could it be him? No . . . Or the old man in black, next to him, with the wattled neck and liver-spotted, veined hands crossed on the handle of his cane? No . . .

No, *what?* Why not? "Well, for one thing," said the cool little voice inside Elsa's head, "the young man wouldn't need to. He must have lots of friends. Whenever he wants it, he can get it from *them,* without trouble.

"And the *old* man . . . is simply that: Too old. Such desires have left him long ago . . . So it must be someone else . . . some other man . . ."

That was it. She was looking only at the men. Only at *their* faces and bodies. Then the answer came to her. It was like a blow in the face and it sent her head back as if snapped. She was looking for the man who had called her on the phone! She was scanning the face of every man she saw, looking for him—only for him!

*"Can I come over now and—"*

*"It'll be fun for both of us. You got no husband, I got no wife."*

Although it was not her stop, Elsa got up and pulled the cord. As she made her way rapidly to the door the young man with the blonde crew-cut looked up. He looked at her, his eyes travelling from her legs up, and there was admiration in his tanned face. Their eyes met and he smiled at her. It was an easy smile, a friendly, healthy one. But she didn't stop.

On the street she composed herself. She had led a disciplined life, self-control was second nature to her. Her business finished at the bank, she went to the market for some meat. As a rule she looked carecarefully to see how the man behind the counter cut what she ordered. But this time she caught herself looking at the man himself. He had a red face and a strong jaw. His arms . . .

Outside the market she passed a sailor, his white hat cocked jauntily over one eye. A loose lock of brown hair fell lazily over one eye. He was tall and long-limbed. She started to look away, but not quite in time: the sailor noticed her, his face quickened with interest. He smiled. She walked rapidly away.

Back home again she washed her face and neck in cold water.

It didn't help.

Claire, the part-time cleaning woman came in the afternoon. Dr. Anders had tried to become absorbed in her work. There were several scientific journals in the mail, she must read up on the latest findings in arachnidology. There was, for example, a piece of the hunting-spider, which pounced upon its victims in a huge leap. She tried to read on about the hunting-spider.

And found herself visualizing a man leaping upon *her.* A man with long, strong arms and legs. A naked man.

She went in the kitchen where Claire was washing the windows. She was a full-figured, good-natured, rather blowsy woman. Now she interrupted a song to greet her employer.

"Gotta new man, Miz Anders!" she cried, cheerfully. It was no use telling her to say "Doctor"—to Claire, doctors attended sick people.

"What happened to the old one?" Elsa asked. She viewed Claire's casual liaisons with the same detachment with which she did the matings of spiders, and the woman entrusted her with confidences she kept from employers with more conventional views.

"Oh, that one!" her voice was scornful. "I sent *him* away. He was no good. Sat around all day eatin' my vittles and drinkin' beer bought with my money. Never showed a speck of energy—until the sun was down, that is!" She gave a coarse chuckle. "This *new* one, now—he *works* in the daytime—and he's every bit as good at night! Better, now I put my mind to it."

She looked at Elsa shrewedly. "How come you don't get you a man, now, Miz Anders? You're a mighty fine-lookin' woman. You got a good figger, too."

Elsa shook her head, smiling. "I can't be bothered with a husband," she said.

Claire was loud in her retort to that. "I wasn't talking about no *husband!"* she declared, scornfully. "I was talking about a *man!"*

So Claire was no use in distracting her mind from its new burden of troubled thoughts. After the charwoman had gone home, Elsa tried to return to her work. For years she had been perfectly happy studying spiders. They were so fascinating in their different ways—the hunting-spider, the trap-door spider, the wolf spider, water-spider, balloon-spider, carb-spider, birdspider.

But now all she could think of was *men!* The young man on the bus . . . the man cutting meat at the butcher's . . . the sailor on the street . . . A hot wave of desire overcame her. She had never known anything like it before. She had never wanted to. And then the telephone rang.

She backed away from the sound of it as if it were alive, a venomous snake striking its ugly rattle. But it continued to ring, and so, slowly, stiffly, she went to answer it.

Even before she heard his voice, she knew it was him. She knew that she had been expecting his call all the day. Not just expecting it—desiring it. It was this she'd been waiting for. The strength went out of her. She sensed his presence . . .

"Hello?" she said.

"Hello, doll," he said. The voice was low-pitched, intense. "This is Lover . . . I said I'd call again . . ."

"Yes," she whispered. "Yes . . ."

"So how about it, baby? Can I come over now and—"

She heard the heavy breathing, but didn't know if it was his—or hers.

For a long moment there was no other sound. Then she said, "Yes. Yes."

Another pause. "You mean it?" The voice was eager. It changed. "You got the cops over there?" Wary, suspicious, poised for flight.

"No!" Elsa cried. "No, there's no one here but me! I live alone! I'm tired of being alone! I *want* you to come over! I *want* you to—"

And she repeated his own words to him.

It must have been that which decided him. No outraged and respectable woman who had connived with the police at a wire-tap would have used those words.

"I'll be over, baby," he promised. "It'll be there in half-an-hour." He breathed a few more descriptive phrases from his obscene vocabulary before he hung up.

Elsa stood by the phone. There was still time to call the police.

She went upstairs and took a bath. She selected her clothing with care. She put on the make-up and scent which she didn't use perhaps as often as once a year.

Dr. Elsa Anders was punctual. It took her almost exactly half-an-hour to prepare herself and come downstairs. But her guest was just as punctual, and he was there at the foot of the stairs to meet her.

"Thoughtful of you to leave the back window open," he said. "I like windows better than doors: More fun, it seems like . . ." His voice died away as he looked at her. No one had ever looked at her like that, not even the young man on the bus, or the sailor on the street.

He had been slouched. Now he straightened up, and she saw that he was really taller than she would have thought. His hair was black and lay close to his scalp. His jaw was long, and almost pointed. The clothes he had on were clean enough, though there was no tie, and a spike of hair lay in the hollow where neck and chest join. Arms and legs were long. His lips were wet and red, as if he had bitten them . . .

But it was his eyes which held her attention. They lay deep in their sockets and they stared at her with a glow and a hunger that was not normal.

He ran his tongue out and licked the corner of his mouth.

"Well . . . isn't *this* something!" he said. "I never expected—I thought I'd find some worn-out old bag, or a withered-up thing . . . *you* know. Where's your bedroom?" he asked abruptly. "Upstairs?"

She nodded, started up. He followed her. His feet made no noise. "I didn't really expect much when I started calling today," she heard him say. "Matter of fact, I usually get my kicks just *calling.*" He chuckled, the sound gurgling in his throat. "Them women! The things they say when I tell 'em what I want—! Some of 'em, they *scream!*"

Dully, she realized it was too late to call the police—even if she wanted to. At the door of her bedroom she turned to face him. It was then that he leaped upon her. Like a hunting-spider leaps on its prey, she thought, as she fell backwards upon the bed. And then his lips were pressing, burrowing, upon the mouth no man's lips had ever kissed before; and his hands were touching the body that had never known the touch of a man's hands before. Fumbling—at first. Then, tearing, ripping . . .

Later, as she sat up, he was talking. The words poured from him in a sick torrent. She paid no attention, what he had to say didn't interest her. She had done it at last. The past was beyond calling back.

"Listen!" she said, suddenly.

At once, he stopped. He turned to her. There was no light in the room, but the light in the hall was on.

"You hear something?" he whispered.

"Out in the hall . . ."

He got up, went to the door. Then he walked over to peer over the landing. Elsa ran on the tips of her toes to the closet, come back just as silently. He turned, came and stood in the doorway.

"Your imagination," he said. "You old maids! Always hearing things . . . well, you won't need no imagination from now on. You got *me.* Now that we're acquainted, I'll be coming around often—real often. You'll like that, won't you, doll?"

"No," said Elsa, crisply. "I wouldn't like that at all."

She threw off the sheet which covered the shotgun, and then she raised it and fired the first barrel, and then the second.

She stepped over him and went into the bathroom. Then she went down the stairs and called the police. They said they would be right over. It came to her then, as she stood there holding the torn edges of her dress together, that there was something she had forgotten.

"Oh, of *course!* The flies." She went into the lab. The window was still open. She always left it open in the afternoon so the flies could come in. The trap was baited with sugar syrup, it caught them alive. She brought the trap over to the glass cages where the spiders were, and shook several flies into each.

The police . . . strange men trampling her house. Well, it couldn't be helped. She felt no remorse. She had simply conducted an experiment, a scientific experiment, one which she'd never conducted before. But as far as the police were concerned, well . . . He'd made an obscene phone call. He'd climbed in by the open window. He tried to rape her.

"I broke away and he came after me, so I shot him." That was all.

She gazed into the cages. The flies had buzzed into the webs. The spiders were leisurely approach-

ing. These in this cage were females. The males were kept separate. If placed together, they would mate—that was natural. That was the way of all living creatures, except—sometimes—man.

But the spiders had a custom of their own. After the mating was finished, the female would pursue the male. If she caught him, and she usually did, she would kill him. And then she would eat him. He had, after all, outlived his usefulness.

Dr. Elsa Anders reflected on the fascinating world of spiders. Then she thought once more of her own affairs. The experiment must be considered a successful one. It had not been altogether unpleasant. Calmly and coolly she thought that she might very well try it again some time. There were many interesting, fit subjects in the town . . . like the young man on the bus. And the sailor in the street.

But next time, of course, she would have to change the ending!

## Sleeved Slip-Up

Forgetting to remove their gloves on a hot summer night led to the arrest of John Bradshaw and Richard Mapp, both 23, on burglary charges in Detroit. Detectives noticed the pair near the home of Benjamin Laikin. They admitted breaking into the residence after officers found $240 and 40 pieces of jewelry in their possession.

## Dual Deceiver

Miami, Fla., police felt complimented when William J. Holliday, 28, who introduced himself as a writer, asked for permission to ride in patrol cars. Holliday said he was writing TV scripts similar to Dragnet that would make the officers famous.

Then the lawmen learned that they were the ones who had been taken for a ride and a search was started for Holliday. They found that their former guest was not only not an author, but that he was wanted on six charges of check forgery involving hundreds of dollars.

## Common Clue

In Hartford, Conn., theft of a portable television set by a man with a black right eye was reported by an appliance store owner. Within a short time Detective Captain Joseph McDonald's squad had picked up four men with black right eyes in the neighborhood. All had alibis and explanations, and the thief was not among them.

## Trimming

John Laughton was clipped for $26 in city court in Portland, Me. That's the fine he paid for cutting the hair of friends without a barber's license.

## Court Jester

In Buffalo, N. Y., a bitter suit alleging patent infringement was in progress in federal court. A witness testified that a certain type of auto windshield wiper, under certain conditions, would assume the shape of "a cupid's bow curve."

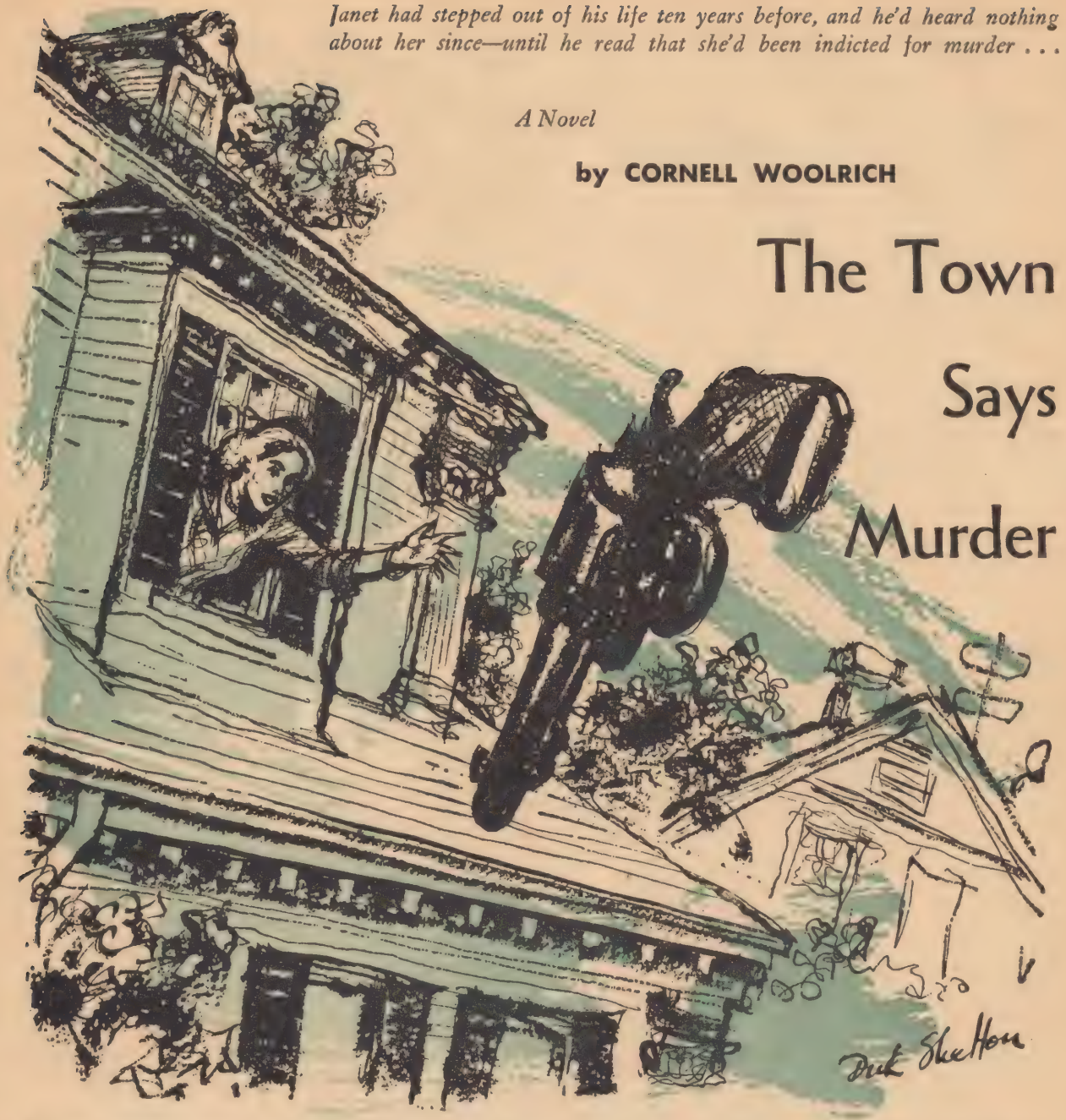
"That," said Judge Justin C. Morgan, "is the first affectionate term I've heard during this trial."

*Janet had stepped out of his life ten years before, and he'd heard nothing about her since—until he read that she'd been indicted for murder . . .*

*A Novel*

**by CORNELL WOOLRICH**

# The Town Says Murder




It said "Peter Ford, Attorney at Law" on the outside door. It said "Private" on the inside one.

Inside the inside one, there was a breathtaking view of the city; a full five-hundred dollars' worth of view. There was expensive wooden panelling all the way up on the walls. There was expensive office-furniture that looked custom-built. There was a desk. There was a youngish man, reading the newspaper.

Everything about the office spelled quiet success. Quiet, not blatant. Its height above the city, stratospheric. The way he sprawled here reading the newspaper. When you're a success, you can put your feet up on the desk like that, make a suspension-bridge of your body, and take time with your newspaper. When you're not, you can't afford to. You have to get down to cases the moment you reach your office.

He was young. Well, young to be so successful. Perhaps in the younger thirties. Even the suit he wore had that careful careless look.

He crumpled suddenly in the middle. The long legs crashed down off the desk. The upper part of him, the head and shoulders, shot upright from the sloping chair. His face was white.

He read it again, whatever it was.

Then he said, "My God," and stood up with a jerk, and left it lying there on the desk.

He went over to the water cooler and drew a cup of water, but then he didn't want it. He stood there holding it with one hand, and his other he held pressed the long way across his forehead. As

though it pained him there. Or, what he was thinking behind there, that pained him.

Then he shook his head a little. He squeezed the life out of the poor inoffensive paper cup, so that the water spurted out of it at both ends at once and not just one, and he flung it down.

Then he went back to the desk and to the newspaper still lying there on it, and he looked at it again. Briefly, as if looking up one single word. He even pinned it down with a quick stab of his finger when he'd found it, that single word, whatever it was, and then he clicked open his inter-office speaker.

His secretary came in and stood in the doorway.

He said, "Where on earth's Appleton?"

She shrugged slightly. "I don't know," she admitted. "But I can find out. Shall I look it up for you?"

His hand briefly flickered across his forehead again, as though he'd caught himself in danger of becoming confused. "I don't have to know where it is," he murmured harassedly. "I just have to be there. Wherever it is, that's where I have to be. Get me a ticket on the first train out, the very first train there is!"

"Round-trip?"

He stopped, and looked at her ruefully for a moment, as though this was not a place you went to, and then came right back from: this was not a thing you took up, and then dropped again right away. "One-way," he said with quiet finality.

She closed the door after her. She was good, she was efficient, that was why he had her there. She reopened the door in five minutes and she said, "You leave in thirty. If you start now, you can make it without crowding."

He already had; he was coming out from behind the desk fast, bringing his briefcase, and struggling to latch it as he came on. He made straight for the door.

"Your hat," she said.

He snatched at it in passing, as an afterthought, but he kept going.

"Your appointments," she said.

"I only have one," he told her, "and this is it."

He changed his mind suddenly, chucked the briefcase back toward her. "Oh, hell," she heard him mutter, "this isn't with briefs, this is with the heart!"

He didn't even close the door after him. He didn't even say goodbye. He just wasn't there any more.

After he'd gone, she went over to the desk and picked up the newspaper.

It was very small, almost buried, but it was easy enough to identify. The key-word gave it away.

"Appleton—Janet Allen, one-time New York stage beauty, now Mrs. Janet Allen Gordon, is under indictment here awaiting trial on charges of murder—"

## 2.

He got off the train and looked around him doubtfully. A dangling sign at the upper end of the station-platform said *Appleton*. He had to wait for the train to clear out of the way before he could even see what the place was like. It seemed to have stubbornly confined itself to one side of the tracks only. And two day-coaches were enough to cover it up from end to end.

He'd never been any farther out in the country than Van Cortlandt Park in his entire thirty-four years. He didn't seem to think he'd been missing much, to judge by his expression.

He crossed the two pairs of tracks and spoke to a sandy-haired man sitting with legs dangling down off the side of a loading platform. "Which way to the Constable's office?"

The lounger swiveled around rearwards on the point of one elbow and jabbed a thumb over his shoulder. "See that white frame house down there? Well, that's her."

The soles of a pair of shoes greeted Ford when he stepped in through the open doorway a minute or so after. One of them had been neatly patched in the upper left-hand corner. They opened into a sight-finder and a face peered through the V-shaped gap. "Howdy," it remarked. "What can I do for you?"

"I'm Peter Ford, of New York City." He put his lightweight bag down. "Here is identification."

The soles disappeared, a torso came up from the depths of a swivel-chair, and an arm came out.

"Hm. Lawyer, huh?"

"I'd like to see a Janet Gordon you're holding for trial up here."

"It can be done," pursed the other, but without too much alacrity. He didn't move at once from the chair. "How do you like our nice new brick jail? Ain't she a corker? Government loan."

"Mighty tasty," agreed Ford astringently. "But why don't you use it for people that really belong in it, and not those that don't?"

The constable laughed in pantomime, with his lips and his shoulders and his eyes, but without a sound. "Mind if I ask you something? How much did your fare come to, getting here?"

"Sixty-three ten," Ford told him.

The swivel-chair's occupant shook his head sorrowfully. "Money thrown out. Might just as well have stayed where you were. *You* can't do anything for her. It's a hopeless case."

This time it was Ford who shook his head a little. But not sorrowfully; in a dreamy sort of way, instead. As though his thoughts were far away from here, and long ago. Sixty-three ten worth of mileage away from here, and ten years ago.

"Were you ever twenty-four?" he asked with a sort of gentle abstraction.

"Why, sure," the other man said readily. "Once. But *you* ain't, not any more."

"No, but I was, once. Were you ever in love?"

"Sure, off'n on, I reckon."

"I was too. And again, just once. No more than that. Just once. And what are they going to prosecute this case with? This case that is so hopeless?"

"The book," the constable told him with relish. "Evidence. Hard and fast. Concrete. Eye-witnesses. *Five* of them." Then he waited. "And what are you going to fight it with?"

"Nothing," Ford admitted simply. "Only a memory. A memory of when I was twenty-four, and when I—was in love."

Keys jangled almost as if in pity. "Come along," the constable said, stirring. "May as well give you something for your sixty-three dollars' worth.

3.

She was like all women who have ever been loved. She shrank back for a moment when she saw who it was, and said, "Oh, Peter, you shouldn't have come. Here of all places. I look terrible. This —this uniform—"

He was like all men who have ever loved. He only saw her face, and he said, "Janet, you haven't changed a day. You're as beautiful as ever. Is it really ten years, or is it only ten days—?"

"Is it really only ten years?" she murmured. "Or is it more?"

He tightened his hold on both her hands. "What have they done to you?" he whispered.

She tried to smile. "Broken my heart," she said softly. "Dumped my hopes and my dreams all out in the ashcan. Put me in jail."

He looked at her. "I don't have to ask it, do I?"

"No, you don't. I didn't do it. But—" She twisted her hands helplessly. "What's the good of saying that, when the whole world says I did?" Then she braced herself, and smiled that crooked little smile again. As though she were the one trying to console him, and not he her. "No one can help me. Nothing. Go on back, Peter. It'll be better that way."

He shook his head with stubborn ruefulness. "I'm the fellow that used to sit out front and watch you come down the stairs each night, to music, those long stairs; the loveliest thing in all New York. A dream walking, with paradise feathers at your wrists. A dream we have at twenty-four; a dream of long ago. A dream we never dream again; a dream we never lose. Yes, that's me; the fellow who used to wait outside the stage door each night, around on Forty-first. Can't you see me now? Every time like the first time a fellow ever waited for a girl, as new as that, as breathless as that."

"Yes, I can see you now," she echoed penitently. "So clean, so honest, so shiny-eyed."

"And then one night you didn't come down those stairs. There was a space where you should have been, there was an empty phrase of music in the score. Forty-first Street was awfully dark that night; you didn't come out. And the old man, my good friend the old man, Cupid with silver stubble on his cheeks, patted me on the shoulder, I remember, and said, 'You better go home, son. She ain't with the show any more. She went off and got married this afternoon.' And in a little while the exit-bulb over the doortop in its wire lattice went out. My dream went out. And I just stood there by myself, in the dark.

"I was too slow, I guess."

"And I was too fast."

"Why didn't you listen to me?"

"Why didn't you make me?"

He sighed. "I only saw him once—and I knew then, he wouldn't be good for you. Good *to* you, maybe, yes; but not good *for* you. And those aren't both the same."

"No," she whispered. "I guess they're not. It's so easy to be wise *after*. But who can be wise *before?*"

After a moment, he asked; "What is the thing about, Janet? The clipping said murder."

"I guess it did," she acquiesced. "Why wouldn't it? The town says murder. The whole world says murder. One against so many. Sometimes I get tired and mixed-up. Sometimes I think they must be right. Sometimes I think, why fight them any more? Let it go, let it be. And then you come along—and suddenly I feel a little braver, suddenly I want to live a little again. Why do you do this to me, Peter? Why?"

Her head went down, drowned in the relief of tears. Tears, he could tell, never shed before, never shed until now, ever since it had first happened. The smothered sound of them came from her, but the twisted, heart-wrenched sight of them was on his own face, as he looked down at her, one hand that longed to touch her and never did, held out arrested just above her head.

"Tell me," he breathed gently, "so I can help you."

She only shook her head.

"Tell me," he changed it to, "so I can know."

She spread her hands and looked up at him again, mournfully helpless. "How can I? What can I? I only know there's a man dead. And everything seems to have closed in on me. Every little thing I said and did, has suddenly turned against me. And this is what's so awful about it, Peter. They hate me here. There isn't an open mind among them. Every mind has suddenly become a trap, and snapped closed, and I'm caught—guilty—inside it, and held there waiting for my death. The outsider. The New York woman. The thing that was different; that dressed different, and walked different, and talked different. And even

*breathed* different, I suppose. The thing that has no feelings like the rest of them, that has no claim. The perfect scapegoat. For years they've been waiting to get me, and now they've got me and they've got me good. It won't be a jury that goes into that box, it'll be a firing-squad."

"Nice place. How'd you happen to end up in a place like this, to *be* here, to stay here all this while?"

"He brought me here originally, Peter. I didn't know why at the time. I used to wonder about it; I've found out since. *Because* it was so small, so lost, so far-away; so never-heard of, and so hard to find. So safe."

"For you?"

"For him." She accepted the cigarette he'd lit for her. "It's funny, a small-towner can go to the city, and in no time it adopts him. But it doesn't work in reverse. I was always the stranger, 'that New York woman', the one who didn't belong. Two strikes against me. Not only New York, but the fact that I'd been in the theatre. I was too different.

"I couldn't be right, no matter what I did. If I dressed my own way, I was showing-off, I was too dressy. I was trying to show I was too good for the place. Then when I tried to dress their way, they didn't like that either; I was condescending, I was trying to make fun of them, I was trying to show them up. When I tried to be cordial they rebuffed me; then when I accepted the rebuff, I was snooty. I was fair game for all the men, and I was the natural-born enemy for all the women. Now there's murder. They'd never had a murder here before, you know, not within the memory of the oldest living inhabitant. They'd only killed with their tongues, not with their hands. 'That New York woman' had to come along and spoil their record."

He reached out and took her hand. "Let's fool them, Janet, you and I," he said very gently, looking deep into her eyes. "Shall we?"

Her answer was so low, but it had the beginning of hope in it. "Can we?"

He took her other hand, as if in some sort of unspoken pact. "Weather forecast:" he promised, "local thunderstorms, followed by clearing. Tomorrow: sunny."

Her head went down again abruptly, but not to cry any more. For a fleeting instant, he felt the imprint of her lips upon his hand.

"Now start 'way back from the beginning," he prompted her, "and tell me how it was, and why it was, and what it was."

## 4.

It was night and she was alone in the house, Harry wasn't due back for two more days yet. Something brought her head up from her book, there in the lamplight. She tried to identify it. Then it came again. Short, surreptitious little pecks at a carhorn. As if in secretive summons, not meant to be overheard by anyone but her. It brought her up out of the chair. Then it came again. A carhorn tap-tapping in an undertone. It brought her at last to the door, outside there by the porch. She could make out the shape of a car vaguely in the gloom. It was at a halt, it was standing there right in front of the house, so it must have been her attention that it sought.

She snapped on a light over her, and said, "Yes? Who is it?"

A man's voice answered, slightly muffled: "Care for a little drive, Mrs. Gordon?"

She recognized both car and voice simultaneously. They belonged to Bob Laughton, the county councilman. The Laughtons occupied the next house over.

Were they going to accept her at last? Was Mrs. Laughton going to relent and extend the olive br . . .? Her heart bounded up, and music came into her voice. "Why, that's very neighborly of you two—" she began gratefully, and came running down the steps. "I've been so lonely in there—" She stopped again. She'd reached the car-side by now. He was alone in it. "Isn't your wife with you? I thought she was."

"She had to go to some ladies' bridge." He smiled sleepily and swung the door out for her. "Hop in."

She pushed it closed again, gently but firmly. "Some other time. Not just—tonight. Thanks just the same." She turned away, went back again toward the porch-steps.

She heard the car-door crack open a second time behind her. She didn't look around. It wasn't until she was already up on the porch once more, back behind the screen of honeysuckle vines, that he overtook her and his arm seized her roughly around the waist, flinging her around toward him.

She didn't just slap him. That was for a schoolgirl. Her hopes had been so high there, just a minute ago; hopes of acceptance, after the long, lonely battle. She knew how to use her fists and she gave him a one-two with them, one on each side of the jaw. He floundered back against one of the porch-pillars, nursing a hand to each side. He didn't look very dangerous now, he didn't look very bold.

"Now get out of here." She didn't want trouble. She had to live here, after all, and the atmosphere was unfriendly enough already, without adding to it. She wasn't liked and neither was Harry. This Laughton had been subtly annoying for quite some time now, but never as openly as tonight. It was as though he'd found out something that had emboldened him all at once.

He thrust out his jaw vindictively. "You're kind of high and mighty, aren't you, for a dame that

used to walk across the stage in nothing but two beads and a bangle?"

She let that go. She didn't say anything.

"A dame that's married to a—", he continued.

"To a what?" she flashed.

"Do I have to tell you?" He picked up his hat, saluted her with it mockingly. "Good night, Mrs. *Gordon*. Think it over, maybe it might pay you to be a little more cordial." He turned and went back toward his car.

Something about the way he'd said her name rang a bell. This time it was she who went after him. She stopped him just as he was about to reenter the car. "Wait a minute. What were you trying to insinuate just now—that my husband's name isn't Gordon?"

He turned and looked at her. "Are *you* so sure it is?" he said with cold enjoyment. He let that sink in, watched the fright it gave her, the fright that came mostly from inside, from some long-stilled suspicion of her own, reawakening at his words. "Just what is his business, anyway?" he drawled. "He don't do anything around here, he just goes away once in awhile and then comes back again. Just what does he do when he goes away like that, where does he go? People around here are curious to know. Seems to me I've seen him someplace before. Seen his face. Maybe if I put myself out to find out just where—" He squinted at her. "And if you're smart, I don't think you'll tell him about this little chat we've had." He slowed his meaning to a ponderous gait. "I *don't* think you'll tell him."

And somehow she knew she wasn't going to. Not fear of Laughton, but fear of her own fear was going to still her.

She stood there frozen. He got in and slammed the car-door. His car blurred out in the dark, quiet as a whispered secret.

## 5.

She said, "Harry, why do we have to stay here in this place?"

The question had been long in forming; it only escaped her lips now, held there all this while, trembling in the balance.

He stood with his finger on the light-switch. He didn't turn to look at her, he just held still like that, head the other way.

She knew he'd heard; she thought he wasn't going to admit it. But then he answered. Just a heartbeat too long after.

"We're doing all right here. We bought this house."

"I know, but you don't work here. You always go somewhere else. We can sell the house again just as easily. Why can't we go to one of the large cities?"

"I don't like large cities," he said, still standing there with his back to her.

"Why, Harry? Why not?"

"I don't like large cities," he repeated.

"It was one of them that brought us together," she reminded him. "It was in one of them—we found each other."

"All right, then that was enough. Now I don't want anything more from them."

She traced a finger along the edge of the bed-covering. "Harry—there's something I want to ask you."

He just waited for her to ask it.

"I know it sounds silly after all these years, but—your name really is Gordon, isn't it? You never changed it or anything like that, did you? I don't know how I happened to think of that now—only it just came back to me about those handkerchiefs you had in your valise, with the wrong initial, when we unpacked after our honeymoon."

"I explained that to you at the time. I went into a store to buy myself some handkerchiefs one day. Hell, I was careless, in a hurry, you know how a single guy is. They were fresh out of my particular initial, so I told them to give me a set with any initial, I didn't care what it was. They gave me C instead of G."

"Yes, but Harry, if they didn't have your initial, why didn't you take a plain set, without any initial at all? They always have those."

After a moment or so he answered with rueful but unangered remonstrance: "You asked me that the first time too, just like now." He finally completed his push at the switch and the light went out.

She murmured almost inaudibly in the dark: "And you didn't answer that the first time either—just like now."

## 6.

At the station she clung to him suddenly, with a pleading, frightened intensity she'd never shown before.

"Harry, take me with you. I don't want to stay here alone while you're away. Not any more, not any more—"

He held her to him, and she knew there was a look of wonderment on his face, at the sudden passion of her plea, though she didn't look up at him. "I can't honey. I can't. Don't ask me to. I would have long ago, if I could, but I can't. Even if I did, you couldn't be right with me *there*, you'd be alone just the same. It's just a short business-trip, I'll be back in two days."

"But *where?* You never tell me, never even write— Where do you *go* when you leave me like this?"

"How can I? Sometimes I never know myself

where I'm going to be next. I might tell you one place, and find myself in another. And what's the good of writing, when I'm going to be back as quick as the letter is itself?"

"But what is it *for?* What do you *do?*"

"Oh, just—*business,*" he mumbled indistinctly. "How can you explain business just in a few words, when you're standing at a station by a train? Arranging deals, picking up commissions, keeping an eye on—on investments here and there—"

"But what *line?* What *kind?*"

"Just business," he said again. He tipped her chin up toward him. "Don't you remember our original agreement? The only thing I ever asked you? You weren't to ask me any questions or to interfere with my business concerns in any way."

"I remember. It seemed so romantic then, just like the whole world seemed so romantic. Now at nights, lying there all alone in that big house, when you're not there, I get so creepy and so lonely, and I start wondering to myself 'Why?' 'Why?' *'Why?'*"

"I've bought you Brownie now. You don't have to be frightened any more. He'll keep prowlers away. You'll be all right."

"Brownie's just a dog. He can't answer *why.*"

He glanced around to make sure there was no one close enough to the two of them to overhear. He dropped his voice. "I'll tell you what you do, if it'll make you feel any more safe," he said soothingly. He detached a small key from his pocket keyholder, put it in her hand, and closed her fingers around it. "Here, take this and open that big cowhide bag of mine, you know the one. You'll find a gun in it. Keep it next to you on the bedside table, nights, till I get back." Then he added: "It's already loaded, so don't hurt yourself with it, whatever you do. Keep the safety on, just the way it is."

She let her fingers spread open again and stared at the key, as though that were it itself, and not just a key. "Harry, I never knew you had a gun. In all these years, I never knew—until now."

He swung aboard the train-steps casually. "A guy is apt to have a thing like that around," he shrugged. "It's not important enough to make a special point of mentioning."

He leaned over and he kissed her, and then the train carried him away.

## 7.

There was extra ammunition for it, nestled in cotton-wool in a trim little plywood box, she found when she went to it. She really didn't need this, he'd said it was loaded already. (And even if it hadn't been, it would have done no good, she wouldn't have known how to put it in anyway.) But for that matter, she didn't need the gun either.

He didn't understand. He didn't understand. She didn't need a dog, didn't need a gun. Her fear wasn't an outside fear, it was in her heart. And it wasn't of prowlers, of strangers, it was for him himself. It was for the stranger that he was, that she could never get to know.

She was holding the little cartridge-box, with its grooved lid thumbed back, looking at its glistening contents absently, her thoughts on a stranger, the stranger in her life, when a knock came downstairs, on the outside door. The knock that she had known was coming sooner or later, one of these nights. The knock she had been expecting ever since Harry's train had pulled out.

The little cartridge-box she thrust aside somewhere, half-lidded as it was, without noticing where. The gun she plunged deep down into one of the capacious pockets of the house-smock she had on, bedding a handkerchief over the top of it to hide it and to hold it in. Not to have it with her—she wasn't thinking of that—but simply because it was a quicker and more instinctive gesture of concealment than to have replaced it in the widely-yawning bag, and then to have closed that with its battery of latches, and to have replaced that back in the closet-fastnesses from which she'd dragged it.

The knock came again, impudent, ribald. A knock that somehow jeered.

She smoothed her hair back, hands tight-pressed. Then she went down. Not fast, not slow; just with calm and dignity.

She flung the door back and they stood looking at one another. The sultry air brought alcohol to mind; just vaguely, not heavily or insistently. Then without a word she tried to close it again.

"I'd listen to me, if I were you—Mrs. Cory."

Her voice wasn't as steady as she wanted it to be. "Why do you call me that? That isn't my name."

He closed the door himself now, from the inside. "It should be. It's your husband's."

She could feel her face getting white. She didn't say anything this time.

"I've got a friend attached to police headquarters in one of the big cities." He moistened his lips with cruel enjoyment. "Last time I was down to see him he let me browse all afternoon in the rogues' gallery. At my own suggestion. It was worth it. It was sure worth it."

She felt for a chair behind her, to help her stand up straight. She didn't say anything, anything at all.

"When he came in to pick me up later, I asked him some questions about one of the pictures I'd come across there. You know, just casually, not as if I had any particular interest in it. He gave me all the details on it. I'm sure you remember the Tremain gang—everyone does. It was smashed up a good many years ago now. They got 'em all, from high to low, from big to little, from the leader, Sam Tremain, on down. All but one guy. Just one guy got through the net, and dropped from sight

from that day to this. And he was important to them, too—the cops, I mean. He was the big shot's right-hand man, lieutenant, or whatever you'd care to call it. He knew all the gang's secrets. He was in Sam Tremain's confidence, more than anyone else. He was the only one held all the threads linking the different activities of the organization together. He didn't do much of the actual dirty-work. He was Purdy's financial expert, he attended to the concealment and the investments, in widely-scattered places and under various forms and guises, of the bulk of the loot that came pouring in, those few years while the gang was riding high. Most of it was never accounted for when the crackdown came. Tremain seems to have trusted him implicitly, and Tremain was no fool. Even the cops admit that this guy was a freak of his kind, one in a thousand: an *honest* gang-member, if you get what I mean. They'd still give their right arms to get hold of him, even at this late day. Only, they've got an idea he's dead by now." He smiled sleepily at her, "I've got an idea he isn't."

She could hardly talk, her windpipe was closing up. "What—what's all this got to do with me?"

"A great deal. This picture I've been telling you about—was your husband's. This face they've got there on their files, it's tipped its hat to me across your shoulder on Myrtle Street, it's stopped in front of me and asked me for a light for its cigarette down on the Main Square."

She needed the chair-back she was hanging onto, more than ever. "It isn't true," her voice said. It is, her heart said: that's why I'm beating like this. Listen to me, it is.

He shrugged. "Then what're you looking so frightened about? If it isn't he can prove it easy enough, can't he? They never yet hooked a guy on the strength of somebody else's picture in the rogues' gallery, did they?" His hand went back of his coat. "Shall I send this? It's all made out, ready to file." He showed her a telegram-form, with words penciled in on it; then pocketed it again before she could get her hands on it. "Are you willing to let him take his chances on clearing himself?"

She didn't say anything for a long time. He waited for her to, with mock deference, and then when she didn't, he laughed a little. His hand went to his coat again, this time it came back with a pocket-handkerchief. But when he touched it to her forehead, just above her eye, she swerved her head violently aside. Then he laughed some more, but just a little. "Warm tonight," he mused, scanning the upper wall high up over her head. Then he just waited for her, some more.

Finally she asked in a smothered voice: "What're you going to do?"

"That's entirely up to you. You tell me."

She came closer to him suddenly, took his coat in her fingers and kneaded it. "Look, I've got some diamonds. Some diamonds that Harry gave me when he first knew me. I don't know how much they're worth, but whatever I can get on them—"

He smiled, like when you're enjoying something you want it to go on. "I don't want diamonds. They can't whisper low into your ear."

"Then what do you want?"

The smile broadened. "Isn't there a looking-glass here in the house with you?"

She became someone else. There was almost clinical horror in the way her eyelids slowly shuttered his face out of her sight; like some unspeakable deformity. Even her voice was someone else's, a voice heard long ago from some grip in the wings, or some sodden wardrobe-mistress in a dressing-room. All immediacy had left it. "Beat it," she said wearily. "Crawl under the door-crack, you can make it. Get out before I start sprinkling roach-powder all over you."

She wouldn't open her eyes at all.

She heard him turn and go. She heard him say, by the door. "I'll give you a day or two to think it over. I'll hold up this telegram for forty-eight hours." She heard him open the door. "And you can't settle it with jewelry, so don't try. Jewelry you probably don't even legally own, jewelry that's been stolen from somebody else. Two days: forty-eight hours. Think it over, let me know."

He went out without closing the door. She heard his step cross the porch, go down the steps, and strike the walk.

Suddenly her eyes were open again. The instinct to strike back—to return an ignominy and a hurt that all of us have. She thrust both clenched hands deep and rigid down into her pockets. She felt the gun there.

She pulled it out and looked at it, and it seemed to kindle from her blazing eyes and ignite into a watery metallic sheen, shapeless in her hand. Anything, anything, to add weight to mere ineffective words; a stick, or a stone, or—this.

She started forward, ran out the doorway with it. Across the porch, and down the steps, and to the one end of the walk that he was at the other end of.

He turned, and he saw the gun. He stopped, crouched slightly, too frightened to move.

Her voice was a wild challenge thrown into the night. "Do you see this? Do you see what I'm holding?"

She came closer to him, but very slowly. Suddenly, at some indeterminate point, the sheen from the street-lamp, further down past the house, caught at it, and once again it ignited spontaneously, just as it had inside the room a moment ago, but this time in coppery incandescence instead of brass.

She stopped again. He shrank a little more, feet caught fast.

Her voice was low, but its intensity carried it well.

"I'll kill you, do you hear me? Right with this,

with what I'm carrying in my hand! You've smashed me up already; if you go a step further, I'll smash you. You won't live long enough to breathe a word to anybody, I promise you that! One word, that's all, one word. *You* think *that* over!"

He turned, and scuttled and floundered into the car, one knee trailing to the floor before he could retrieve it. And when the car pulled out, that too had a slithering, cringing air about it that matched his own.

She went back inside and closed the door behind her. And in a moment the glow had gone out behind the fanlight.

Against the lamplight the silhouette of a woman's head reared from the outside of the hedge, where the public walk was; and never straightening to full height, it too undulated away, as frightened and as surreptitious as the driver and as the car had been.

8.

At the next stop out, before Appleton, the train came in, with that almost human sigh of weariness that trains always give. She darted out of the station waiting-room and ran up close beside it before it had even come to a full halt. She knew just which car to look for him in, she'd met him on arrival so many times before. He always took the last car, no matter how many cars there were.

She saw him by the window, and struck it a quick tap, and then he saw her. He made to open it, but she motioned him not to, and stabbed her finger toward the doorway up at the end of the car. There were people in the seats before him and behind him, and it couldn't be told through an open window.

She hurried down there, and got there before him, but then she had to shrink aside until the handful of passengers getting off here were out of the way.

Then he tried to come down the steps to her in their wake, but she motioned him to stay where he was, and climbed up them and inside, herself. She didn't want him seen out on the platform. "No, no, stay in here, stay back!" She drew him aside into a corner of the vestibule, where they were out of sight of the aisle.

"Janet," he said, astonished. "What're you doing here? This isn't our station!"

"I've been in there all day," she said, "that waiting-room. I walked the whole way down from Appleton, early in the morning, soon after daybreak, when no one was on the road much yet. I've been meeting every train going our way all day long. Luckily there weren't many. There was no other way of heading you off—" She took him by the coat-lapels, shook him imploringly. "There's only a minute's time, the train'll be moving again. A minute is so *little*. So short to lie in. Don't lie to me, in our one little minute that's all we have! If you love me, tell me the truth. Are you Michael Cory? There's no time now for anything but the truth. *Are* you Michael Cory?"

His chin went down. "Harry Gordon's my right name. It's on my birth-certificate, it's the name I was born with. But I was Michael Cory for a while, that's how they knew me, that was my alias —before I met you. I reversed the usual procedure. I thought I could go back to being my own self again, get away with it. I guess I was wrong."

There was no time for reproaches. "All aboard" had already sounded up ahead, trackside along the platform. All she said was: "Harry, why did you do that to me? Why, Harry, why? What had I ever done to you?"

"You wouldn't have had me as Michael Cory. Once you mentioned his name, when I first knew you, and there was horror in your voice, you closed your eyes. You were so clean, you were redemption. And I wanted some happiness of my own, like others have. You were so beautiful up there on the stage of the Follies, and I was only a man after all."

A tear, perhaps for him, perhaps for her, perhaps just for the past itself, hung suspended on a silver wire against her cheek. "Harry, there's someone here in the town that knows, has found out. Never mind who, there's no time now, the train's beginning to move. Harry, don't get off at our stop. Stay on, ride straight through to the other end of the line. Keep away from the window, lock yourself up in the washroom, keep out of sight until you get safely past Appleton."

She tore herself from him, turned outward toward the steps, as the train began to pick up speed.

"Are you quitting, Janet? Is this the finish?"

"No, I'm sticking. Straight through to the end. No matter what you were, no matter what you did, your love was good. Your love *was* redemption. And I never knew Michael Cory, don't forget, from first to last; he never crossed my threshold. But I can't stay on this train with you right now, we'd only be picked up together in a few hours at the most, as soon as I was missed back at Appleton. If I go back now as though nothing had happened, I can get you a full forty-eight hours head-start. You'll need that much to find some place where the two of us can lie low and be safe again for awhile. Send word to me, and then I'll come to you."

He tried to kiss her, in his hungry jubilant gratitude, but she didn't see to see him try, her head had turned the other way. To where the ground was swimming past more rapidly all the time.

She lowered herself to the bottom step. "And Harry, try to get in touch with me before tomorrow night, if you can. *Before tomorrow night,* do you understand? That's the time-limit, the deadline—"

She swept offside and down to the platform below. The train hurtled on past her, and her skirt tried to go after it for a minute, then circled back to her and subsided.

9.

She was all packed and waiting when the phone rang. She'd been ready ever since before dawn, not knowing just when the summons was likely to come. Knowing it would, though, from hour to hour, from moment to moment; knowing nothing would stop it. Whatever else was to be questioned about him, there was one thing she knew didn't need to be: he didn't love her lightly. That was the one thing real, the one thing true, in a life that had undone everything it touched—beginning with himself.

So this was it now, the message from him, telling her where to go, where to wait for him, how and when to find him.

She wasn't surprised that it was another voice, a stranger's voice, that answered her. She'd half expected it to be.

The voice was cautious, low-spoken; she'd expected that too. "Is this, er— Well, you'd better give me your number, first."

"Appleton, three-two-one."

"That's the number I want," the voice admitted. "But I have to make sure I'm speaking to the right party—" The voice hesitated, "Mind telling me, what were you holding on the back of your hand, when you came down the stairs one night, a long time ago?"

She didn't smile; there was pain in it, somewhere. "A gilded cardboard bird of paradise."

"That's right," the voice corroborated. "I have a message for you."

"Let me have it. Just tell me—I'm all ready. Where to go—where to wait— Everything's packed, I can leave on the very next—"

The voice said falteringly: "You better just stay where you are awhile, until—" Then didn't go on.

"Can't my party make it yet, isn't he ready?" she pleaded. "I *can't* wait around here. It's not good here. Tonight the time is up, and I have to be out of here by then. I can't stay on past tonight. Just give me a general idea of where to be, and I'll go there and wait until my party, until he is ready for me. I don't care how long it takes—"

The voice came back more forcefully. "Don't you understand what I'm trying to tell you. There isn't *any place* you can go to meet him. There isn't any use in your going anywhere and waiting, because he can't be there. Not now. Not later. *No* time." It stopped a minute, then went on: "They got him."

She shaded her eyes briefly, with one hand. Then she spoke again. "Well, all right. I understand. Where are they holding him, where have they taken him? Tell me where that is, and then I'll go there instead. I'll be with him that way instead. Even if they won't let me see him, at least I can be near him. I want to be, now more than ever. Tell me, and I'll start right out now—"

"They didn't get him that way," the voice said quietly. "They got him the other way."

She didn't make a sound. The voice waited, and then when she didn't make a sound, the voice finally resumed again.

"Somebody sent them a telegram from your town, and they were all set, waiting for him; he practically walked into their arms. He managed to shake them off and make it back to where a couple of us were, waiting for him. Don't ask me how; just on will power alone, I guess. He lasted just long enough after that to whisper a message, for me to give to you. He said it was the most important thing in the world, more important than money, more important than cops, more important than—going to heaven, even, or going to hell. Here it is. He said: 'Tell her I'll have to break our date. She used to be in the Follies, you know, and she's not used to having anyone stand her up. Tell her if she'll only forgive me this once, I'll never stand her up again.'"

"I forgive," she answered softly, "I forgive him."

After awhile, the voice had gone, and she was alone there, still holding the telephone receiver in her hand. On an empty line to another world. She tried to put it back where it belonged. On the second try she got it on.

10.

It was later that same day that the thing with the gun happened. She'd come across it lying overlooked in one of the bureau drawers where she'd been keeping it ever since he'd gone away the last time. She picked it up and stood looking at it a minute. A feeling of revulsion seized her at the sight of it. It became, suddenly, a symbol of what had wrecked her marriage, cost him his life. It stood for violence and lawlessness. It was the rival that had taken him away from her, more irrevocably than any woman ever could have. It was evil, it was darkness, it was death. She didn't want it near her, she never wanted to see a gun again.

Grimacing with her horror, she hastened into the back room with it. Because that was away from the street, away from houses and people. There was a window standing open there, looking out on the empty fields behind the house. She went to it, and flung the weapon as far out, and as far away from her, as her strength could send it. Then she started to turn away.

Before she could complete the movement, some-

thing went wrong, something happened. She might have dislodged the safety-catch in flinging it from her. Or it might have hit a stone in falling. She wasn't very used to handling the things. She didn't even know what it was at first, thought here had been a freak thunderclap just outside there in the middle of the sunny noontide hush.

A minor tendril of smoke, like from a child's firecracker on the Fourth of July, came up from the grass in the middle distance, then drifted away again. And that was all, nothing else happened. It had just gone off by itself.

There was no one in sight. The fields stretched drowsy and empty under the hot noon sun as far as the eye could reach. No one had heard it, no one had been attracted by it.

She went to the front of the house and looked out from there, all up and down the street that ran past. No one had heard on this side either. The street was lifeless, no one inquiringly at any of the windows, no one at any of the fence-gates or any of the doors. Not even at the Laughton house next-down, which was the closest of all to her own.

As for the bullet, it must have spent itself the other way. It must have lost iself in space, somewhere far out across the empty fields. Away from all the houses, where it could do no harm.

Reassured, she withdrew again, to wait for her train. The train the Other Way, the train of final parting, the train to New York.

Just a stray shot, that nobody had heard. How could it matter much?

## 11.

And now an hour more had gone by. Or maybe two. The time for waiting was used up, the time for leaving was at hand. The train to New York was out along the track somewhere, coming her way, ten minutes away. Rushing toward her, coming nearer, every moment. Now nine, now eight. Soon its whistle would whisper, then its whistle would wail. It would stop briefly, no more than a jolt and a hitch, then it would hurtle on. She must be there when it stopped, for it wouldn't wait.

Even though your dreams are gone and your heart's been stricken, ten years is a long time to live in a place. She took her last look through the windows at Appleton. Saying I forgive you, saying goodbye.

It was mid-afternoon now, and the street outside had come back to a semblance of life again, after its midday hiatus. On the opposite side, a short distance down, two women were standing by a fence gossiping. Behind them, in the yard of that particular house, but with an unobstructed view straight through to the front, a broad-beamed Negress was taking down wash. At the next house down, a grocery errand-boy's bicycle leaned up against a shade-tree, while he was inside making a delivery.

Appleton was at peace with the world. Appleton, which had done its job so well, its job with her. Appleton, drowsing like a cat after a mouse-kill. They called the city cruel, but the city couldn't be as cruel as this friendly homey little place had been.

Goodbye, she addressed it dully, and I hope you're satisfied.

Off in the distance the Three O'Clock, the freedom train, the train for New York, the train for refuge and oblivion by way of heartbreak, whistled forlornly just as she had known it would, giving a sort of disembodied death-cry over the still landscape.

She'd better start down for the depot, she didn't want to miss it.

With the cigarette she had been passing the time with while waiting, still in her hand, she moved toward where her bags, her hat, her coat, stood waiting, huddled all together in the center of the room.

She never got there. The train keened for the second and last time, closer at hand now, coming into the homestretch.

Then it happened. That same thing again. A clap like a freak thunderbolt in the cloudless afternoon air, somewhere just outside the house. Very close by. Memory of the first time told her what it was, what it must be, this second time. For a moment she had a sickening impression that it, that gun of his, must be bewitched, had exploded by itself all over again, without the slightest touch of human fingers, lying alone all the way out where she'd thrown it. As though activated by a malign intelligence of its own. A devil-gun.

And then a woman screamed outside, shattering the silence that had followed the report. And that guided her. For she had thrown the gun into the fields at back, and this scream was from the front, was from the street.

She ran instinctively to the window at the side, the nearest one of all, the one that looked toward the Laughton house. It was open like all the rest; as she reached it all she had to do was support herself by cupping her hands to the inside rim of the sill, and then lean her upper body out far enough to see. Not only opposite, to the side of the other house, but sideward and up ahead to the street.

There wasn't, at first sight, anything unusual to be seen. It was as though the tableau in all its components had held itself intact, unchanged, from that previous look of farewell only short minutes ago.

Directly opposite her Bob Laughton, who must have come home early today, was leaning out of his ground-floor rear side-window, trying to reach something on the clapboards down below the sill, with both arms straining downward at full length, and doing a little crossing and intercrossing dance, like when two branches stir in a breeze. He was leaning so far over in his intentness, that she could-

n't see his face at all, only the incipient bald-spot at the back of his head. It was as if something had just slipped from his grasp and he was trying desperately to touch it, and pull it up to him again.

On the other side of the street, in strategic center axis that gave them full command of both windows, hers and his, were still the two matrons of the town who had been chatting there the time before. No chatting now, though. Both turned this way, standing frozen, each reaching blindly for the other with a hand, to find support; staring from her to Laughton, from Laughton back to her again. It was one of them who had given that scream just now, she could tell. Both faces alike were curdled with the acid corrosion a scream leaves behind, though only one had sounded.

And then slow-motion started in, the slow-motion of horror. As when the camera of life has unaccountably slowed down, and all action becomes a sluggish swim, that takes so long to complete itself, that takes so long.

The Negress from the back yard moved lumberingly forward to join the two sidewalk ladies, eyes bulging. The errand-boy left the bicycle he had been about to remount, also sidled up toward them. As if for superstitious protection.

The window just above the one Laughton was in, on the second floor, was flung up and Mrs. Laughton stuck her head out, hair still awry from her rudely-disturbed afternoon nap. Snubbing Janet Gordon even at this moment of crisis, she spied her two friends, her peers in righteousness, on the other side of the street and called out to them: "Land sakes, whatever was that? It's getting so a body can't—"

The question wasn't answered. The spiny finger of one of the two women shot out in shaky accusation, finding Janet Gordon, pointing at her, and stayed that way from then on. Marking her for all the town, for all the world, to see.

Janet Gordon looked down at the sill directly under her, and saw the fingers of her own hand riveted to the inward rim of the sill, too flat to be seen by them below because of the fore-shortening of upward perspective. And between two of the fingers, imbedded, pressed tight, forgotten, burning down almost to the point of skin-contact, the cigarette that held her fate in it. From it a gauzy aurora of bluish smoke-haze irradiated, opening fan-wise, then rising, drifting outward—just as it would have from a gun-bore—into the open sunlit air, between them and herself. Then dissipating into nothingness. But only after it had damned her. Only after it had lied and doomed her.

She did the wrong thing. The one thing there was to do, she did wrong. Fright took her too quickly—for she had already recognized the hazy stigma for what it could imply to them—and took her hand the wrong way. She jerked it inward off the sill; the reflex was to hide the smoke from their sight—and therefore didn't cast the cigarette outward from the window and down into their ken. But behind her somewhere onto the floor of the room.

The smoke was gone now, but there was no way to prove what it had been.

A moment later, before she had even had time to withdraw into the room, she saw Bob Laughton's body, at that other window opposite, beginning to lengthen, as gravity, after a brief equipoise, finally had its way with him. His waist sidled over the sill after his shoulders, his hips after his waist. Suddenly his legs flung over in an arc that brought them over to the other side of him, and he dropped. All the way down; the little way there was.

And it was obvious, by the still way he fell, and by the still way he lay after falling, that he was dead. Shot dead.

## 12.

He didn't speak. He was still hearing the recital, though she had finished telling it. It was in his eyes, the unflinching but yet moody way they looked toward her but not at her; it was in the creases that were etched in parallels across his forehead. It was in the way his hand choked hers, and yet—she could tell—didn't know it was holding it at all.

"So you see, it's hopeless, as I said," she murmured at last. "One woman against a town." Then she reflected, "Don't feel too bad; I'm not sure I care too much any more. The punishment came before, not after. They can't hurt me any more; that's been done already. Do one last thing for me. Go on back. Don't let them hurt you too. Just—think of me now and then; remember the light over the stage-door on Forty-first Street, if you have to. I'll be all right."

He stood up with alacrity, almost with suddenness, as though in obedience to her. He gave her a look, and she couldn't read it, what was in it. Only knew it burned from him, so it must have been the candlepower of the heart that kindled it.

"Sure it is," he agreed. "Sure, it's hopeless. Sure, it can't be won. But who wants to win the kind that *can* be won? That's why I'm staying, and that's why I'm going to win." He bent over and put his lips to her forehead. "This is a promise, Janet. My promise to you. You see, there are three of us involved in this; you, and me, and my heart. You can't argue with the two of us. Even if I went away like you want me to, there'd still be one of us left here with you."

He let his hand trail gently off her shoulder. "Look for us in court, darling. We'll both be there."

There was something akin to tears in her eyes, but she was smiling tremulously. Almost—well almost as if she were finding out how to be happy again.

"I'll see you in court, Peter," she whispered. "See you in court."

13.

An acid-faced woman confronted him at the door. The dog peered out from behind her skirts at him.

"I'm Ford, Janet Gordon's attorney," he said, and reached for his wallet.

"Hmph," she sniffed. " 'Attorney'. Hmph."

"I'm still her attorney, hmph or not. You've been looking after a dog belonging to Mrs. Gordon, since she was taken into custody, I believe?" he asked.

"What about it?"

"I'd like the animal turned over to me. It remains her property whether she's in jail or not."

She glowered at him for a moment, then edged the terrier disdainfully forward with the toe of her shoe. "Hmph! Well, good riddance. I don't cotton to the idea of looking after no murderess' pets anyhow!"

The door went *bam!* and the dog stayed on the outside of it, with him.

He reached down and curried it under the chin. "Hello, boy. So far so good. At least I got *you* released, didn't I?"

14.

The woman on the stand fingered the collar of her dress diffidently.

"Don't be embarrassed, Miss Rutherford," the prosecutor encouraged her. "Please continue. A pardonable neighborly curiosity is no crime, it's something we all share alike. On the night in question, then, you edged up closer behind the porch-creepers when you made out the figure of a man taking his leave at this woman's house?"

"Well, I—I reckon maybe I did go a step or two off the sidewalk, over to one side of the porch, without exactly noticing. I couldn't calculate who it could be; we all knew her husband had gone off just that day on one of them mysterious trips of his—"

"And then what happened? Tell the court."

"I recognized Bob, Bob Laughton. He stood there for a minute looking back into the lighted room at her. He was smiling in a sort of dignified way and shaking his head. I heard him say: 'You can't bribe me like that. That jewelry you're offering me has probably been stolen, doesn't even belong to you in the first place. Think it over.' And then he closed the door and started to go down the porch-steps, about his business."

"And is that all, Miss Rutherford?"

"No sir, not by a long sight. A minute later the door opened a second time, and she came out after him. It was all I could do, standing by them porch-creepers, to keep from screaming out. She had a gun in her hand! I seen it plain as day. I seen the dangerous look on her face too. He stopped in his tracks, on the bottom step, like anyone would have. She came up real close to him, and she sorta hissed at him. If I hadn't been standing that nearby I wouldn't have heard what it was."

"And what was it she hissed at him, as you term it—can you recall?"

"Every blessed word! She hissed: 'I'll kill you, hear me? I'll kill you right with this, that I'm holding in my hand! You won't live long enough to breathe a word to anyone, I promise you that!' And then she turned and started to go in again. '*You* think *that* over,' she hollered after him from the doorway."

15.

"I know this must be very painful to you, Mrs. Laughton. But when you noticed your husband was worried, troubled about something, did you ask him what it was?"

"I did. He said: 'There's a criminal living in our midst, Jemima. A dangerous criminal, and not very far away from us either. I owe a duty to the community in which I live. On the other hand, I have to think of my own safety and yours. I may be risking it.' Then he showed me a telegram he had all ready to send out, to the Police Department in one of the big cities. He just showed it to me in his hand, without letting me read it. I said: 'Is it the people in the next house over, Bob?'

"He just looked at me real hard, without saying nothing. He didn't say it wasn't, so I knew it was.

"I said: 'You do whatever you think best, Bob. You know your own duty.'

"He said: 'Then it's my duty to send this,' and he put it in his pocket. That's the last time I ever saw him alive. When he came back that afternoon was w-when it h-happened—"

"Your witness, Mr. Ford."

"I couldn't be heartless enough to add to this lady's very genuine grief by harassing her with a cross-examination. No questions."

16.

Sullen undertones: "Look at her." "Where's her fine airs and fancy feathers now?" "Keepin' her eyes down that meek. No wonder, she can't look honest folk in their faces." "That New York woman!"

"Silence in the court. Be seated, please."

"I'm only going to ask you two or three very brief questions, Mrs. Cory."

"Objection."

"Sustained. Rephrase."

"—Mrs. Gordon. Questions which you shouldn't have any difficulty in answering. First, is this your gun?"

"My husband's."

"Is it the gun that was in your possession preceding the death of Bob Laughton?"

"It was in my possession, yes."

"Was it fully loaded when it came into your possession, or was it not? Were all its chambers filled, or were they not? Answer that please!"

"Peter, is it all right to— What shall I—?"

"Tell the truth, Janet. Do as I instructed you. Don't be afraid, stick to the facts, no matter what they are and no matter what you are asked."

"(How touching. 'Janet' and 'Peter.' Customary for counsel and client, no doubt? Or just in the large cities?)"

"Your honor . . ."

"Counsel will refrain from such remarks as prejudicial."

"Will 'the lady' answer the question, then?"

"It—the gun—was fully loaded. I looked at it when I first took it from his bag. All the chambers were filled."

"Do you hear that, ladies and gentlemen? Now. How many times did it go off while it was in your possession?"

"Once."

"You admit of your own free will that it did go off once while it was in your possession, in your hand?"

"I—I'm mixed up. I didn't know you meant— Not in my *possession*. Not in my *hand*."

"But you just said—"

"I wasn't holding it. It went off once, but I wasn't *holding* it. I thought you meant while I had custody of it."

"If you weren't holding it, who was?"

"No one was. It went off by itself."

"Go ahead. Don't let their laughter distract you. They have a habit of laughing at ridiculous statements. Why this is, I don't know."

"I threw it from the window, and it went off by itself. It went off on the ground."

"I have no comment to make. You threw it from the window—from the window on the side of your house looking toward Bob Laughton's house—and it 'went off by itself on the ground.' Just answer yes or no."

No answer.

"Well why don't you answer? Why are you looking so—appalled? That was a question."

"No. I threw it from the window on the other side of the house, toward the open fields—"

"You threw it from a window on the *other* side of the house, the side *away* from Bob Laughton's house, and it went off by itself on the ground, *there*. In other words, with the whole width and thickness of the house between it and Bob Laughton. Here was the trajectory of its bullet—" He illustrated with his hand. "Straight up, then a right-angle turn, then over the roof of your house, then down on the other side again. Educated bullet. That's all. Step down, please."

"No questions. Matron, look after the witness, please."

17.

"Then you saw the defendant at the window immediately following the sound of the shot, Mrs. Reed?"

"I did."

"Did you see anything else—about her, in relation to her, I mean?"

"I saw smoke coming out across the windowsill, from where she'd had her hand a minute before."

"Did you see her throw anything to the ground *between* the two houses?"

"No sir. I saw her throw something in back of her, though. Swing it like this, into the room in back of her."

"Flung her hand in back of her, but the smoke stayed there?"

"The smoke stayed there, you couldn't miss it. Then it drifted out, and there wasn't any more after that."

"Thank you."

18.

"You recognize this gun, Constable?"

"I do."

"You're familiar with guns, Constable?"

"That's my job."

"This is a—?"

"Thirty-eight calibre."

"The bullet that was removed from the body of Bob Laughton was a—"

"Thirty-eight calibre bullet, sir."

"You have control of the permits issued for firearms in this community?"

"That comes under my jurisdiction."

"Is there another thirty-eight calibre that you know of in the possession of anyone in this town?"

"This is the only thirty-eight calibre in this district. I have never issued a license for one, and no one here owns one."

"Now. When you found this weapon, how many times had it been fired?"

"It had been fired just once. Only one bullet was missing from its chambers."

"Repeat that louder. I want everyone to be sure to hear it."

"It had been fired once. Only one bullet was out of it."

"Now look at this exhibit. Is this the spent bullet removed from the body of Bob Laughton?"

"It is."

"Repeat once again. From what calibre gun has this bullet been fired?"

"This is a thirty-eight calibre bullet, from a thirty-eight calibre gun."

"Oh, just one more thing, before I forget. Just where did you find this gun?"

"On the ground, in back of the defendant's house."

"*Close* in back, or quite a ways in back?"

"Quite a spell in back, sir."

"Last question. Would it have been possible to throw it there from, say, the window at which Mrs. Gordon was seen by these other witnesses?"

"Impossible. No one could throw anything that far. Or up overhead like that."

"Well, then, would it have been possible for anyone to carry it out there, just drop it, and then go back without it? About how long would that take?"

"Three, four minutes, sir."

"And how long was the defendant without surveillance, before you made the arrest?"

"I'm sorry, sir, but it was all of fifteen, maybe even twenty minutes, before I got down there and entered the premises."

"Your witness."

"No questions. I haven't any doubt that the respected Constable knows a .38 gun, knows a .38 bullet, knows what licenses are out, and knows just where he finds such a gun when he does find it."

19.

"There are only a few simple facts to remember in this case, ladies and gentlemen. The defendant threatened to shoot the victim if he disclosed his knowledge of her husband's criminal past. He nevertheless prepared and filed a telegram, resulting in the death of the criminal she had been trying to shield. She carried out her threat. The very next time she set eyes on Bob Laughton, she shot him in cold blood, from the window of her house in broad daylight—out of revenge, now that it was too late to silence him any longer. You have heard her admit that the gun was fully loaded. You have heard her admit that it discharged once while in her possession. You have heard the constable testify that there was one bullet out of it when he retrieved it from the ground in back of her house. You have heard his report that the bullet taken from the body of Laughton was of the same calibre as this gun, and furthermore that there was no other licensed gun of this particular calibre anywhere in this vicinity.

"I need not add anything to all that. It stands by itself, complete, intact.

*"The State asks that this woman be sentenced to death. The State rests its case."*

20.

Ford got up and looked around him. He took a moment or two to begin. He looked at the spectators, he looked at the jury, he looked at the judge. Then he looked at her. A fleeting thought entered every head in the room at one and the same time, for just an instant, but no one knew his neighbors had all had it too: "What made him look so *young* for just a moment, there? So *young!* He isn't that way now that I look twice."

"The defense has very little to say in rebuttal. In fact, nothing whatever."

A surging tide of surprised comment welled around the court room.

"You may have noticed," he went on when it had been quelled, "that I haven't exercised my right of cross-questioning a single one of the prosecution's witnesses. There's a very good reason for that. An honest witness is one thing. A lying witness is another. There hasn't been a man or woman on that stand during the entire course of this trial who hasn't truthfully told, in good faith, what they thought they saw. In other words, they were telling the truth to the best of their knowledge and ability."

Another excited drone of murmured incredulity throbbed up.

"All I ask is a chance to show this court and jury what they saw. Not what they *thought* they saw, but what they really saw. Not tell them, but show them with their own eyes. For this purpose I respectfully ask the court's permission to adjourn the entire proceedings to the plot of ground lying between the Laughton and Gordon houses. I wish to deliver my summation there, not by word of mouth but by a reenactment of the death-scene—as it actually took place."

(Conference between judge and prosecutor.)

"Permission granted."

21.

A new courtroom now, in the open air. The two houses forming its side walls. The open street its back wall. The fields behind those houses its front wall. With this difference: a screening-arrangement of plyboard had been erected, supported by tall posts and chicken-wire, across the back, from house to house, to form a literal wall behind spectators, jury, and judge, and about six feet higher than the tops of their heads. For this one unconventional session, all alike were facing the one way: toward the open street. Judge in the center, forefront, jury on each side a little to the rear, and behind them in

turn, spectators. Then the plyboard barricade, in interlocked sections, such as prefabricated houses are sometimes constructed of.

All the homes nearby had been stripped of every available straight-backed chair in them to provide seats for jury and spectators. It was the first time, at least since colonial days, that court had ever been held in the open air, but a search through the statute-books had failed to find anything that specifically prohibited this. Though nothing specifically permitting it was found mentioned either. It was now the following afternoon; the recess, at Ford's urgent request, had been extended a full twenty-four hours, to the exact time the events had originally taken place.

The ground fell away somewhat toward the rearward fields, so that the street itself was on an abutment, moderately higher than the level at which jury and spectators sat. This did not interfere with their view in any way, since it brought the street-level up to about their waists, and they were still able to obtain perspective in a forward sweep.

The defendant, under guard of course, had been returned to her own house, to permit her participation in the reenactment.

Court was called to order.

Ford came out on the slope to address a few opening words to the assemblage gathered before, and just slightly below, him. He consulted his watch, and seemed anxiously concerned at what it had to say to him.

"Mrs. Gordon, of course, will play herself. Will the two ladies—I believe their names are Mrs. Reed and Miss Connors—who were chatting over there on the far side of the street, please resume their positions as they were of that day? Thank you."

They shifted grudingly. "Fiddlesticks!" Tomfoolery! Just wastin' folks' time with his hocus-pocus!"

"I know," he said patiently. "But is it too much to ask you to leave your friends and cross a street? A woman's life is at stake."

They trundled forward, wagging their heads dubiously and mumbling objections. He waited until they had taken up their position at the designated spot. "Now Miss Patricia Ann Simms, as eyewitness number three."

The broad-beamed laundress waddled up the slope, proclaiming exuberantly to all and sundry: "Dass twice I'se been a eyewitness! Ain't dat something?" She repaired to the neighborhood of the yard-clotheslines, rearward to the first two ladies.

He turned back to the jury. "I'll play the part of Bob Laughton myself, when the time comes. But for the present I'll remain here, to give you a sort of running commentary on what you are seeing. Oh, there's one more character needed to complete the quota of participants." He hesitated considerately. "I don't like to ask Mrs. Laughton to relive a painful scene like this a second time— Would she care to nominate someone in her place? Simply to raise the upstairs window and look out at the proper time."

The widow stood up with mournful dignity. "I can stand it, if I've got to. Though what good all this is—"

Several of her friends tried to dissuade her. "Shame! Shame!"

She came forward, nevertheless, was escorted up the rise, and entered her own house by the back door. She was being a figure of tragic nobility, a Spartan matron; she knew it and she made sure they knew it too. She was lost to sight in there, presumably having ascended the back stairs to the room in which she had been napping that day.

"Now we're ready!" Ford said. "First a brief prelude, preceding the actual shooting by a matter of several hours. You will witness the events in pantomime, with whatever slight explanation that may be necessary for the sake of clarity from time to time." He consulted his watch again, and again it worried him. "Now will you pay close attention, please?"

He didn't have to tell them. A breathless hush had fallen over the assemblage. Whether he was primarily interested in that or not, the dramatic effect he had achieved was perfect, far better than any cut-and-dried summation delivered indoors in a musty courtroom could have ever hoped to be.

The palmetto fans stopped and stood poised. The knitting (there were even cases of knitting there) stopped. Even the chewing-gum slowed down, if it didn't stop altogether.

"Mrs. Gordon is upstairs in her bedroom. That window marked with a chalk cross beneath its sill. Since you can't see her from here, I'll ask the deputy in whose custody she is to report on her actions to you. Officer, please!"

The deputy stuck his head out of the upstairs window. "The defendant is all packed and ready to leave, waiting for her train. She is in the bedroom here, giving a last look around—"

"The way a person does who is about to leave a house for the last time," supplied Ford. "Now, Officer?"

The deputy turned his head, brought it forward again. "The defendant has opened a drawer in a stand next to the bed," he reported. "She has found the gun in it, and is standing there looking at it—"

"How, Officer, how?" prompted Ford.

"Kind of disgusted, like when you hate the sight of a thing."

"Go on, Officer, go on."

"She ran out of the room with it just now, and into the back room."

The commentary wasn't necessary for the brief interlude that followed; they could see it for themselves. One of the back windows flashed upward, swimming in the sun. Janet Gordon appeared in the opening for a quick glimpse, just long enough

to fling out her arm, then turn away again.

Something came sailing out and landed out in the field, a considerable distance behind the house. Something that flashed as it went.

"A thing like that never repeats itself," Ford said. "But there was an explosion as that gun fell—it struck a small rock and went off. I'm going to ask you to imagine the bang of a shot. A shot the sound of which was diluted in the open; by having nothing around it to act as a sounding-board. A shot which nobody in the other houses over here along the street heard. A shot which was only heard by Mrs. Gordon herself. But the result: a weapon which had been fully loaded, had now become one cartridge short. One damning devastating, incriminating cartridge short.

"Now deputy, your turn."

The deputy said: "The defendant has now returned to the original room, the bedroom, from which the gun came. She sees the box of spare cartridges still lying there, now that the gun is gone. She picks the box up and throws it over into the corner. The lid slides open and some of them come out and roll around on the floor, like marbles."

Ford looked at his watch again, and it troubled him. His face was paler than it had been awhile ago, as though strain were slowly but steadily drawing off the blood. He jerked his necktie-knot clockwise, from twelve around to three. They could see him breathing underneath his shirt.

"Mrs. Gordon," the deputy droned, "has seated herself in the middle of the room, on the edge of one of the valises, to wait out the rest of the time for her train."

Ford was looking at his watch steadily now, as if something or other depended on it; as if it were a stop-watch, controlling some kind of a course to be run. He raised his other hand and held it poised, as when you're going to drop some kind of a signal.

A stage-wait ensued. In the best-managed plays, in the most accurate of repetitions, there's sometimes an inadvertent stage-wait. Only in life itself, in the actual event, is there never any hitch of timing. Because—this has never been done before, there's no schedule to be followed.

The wait became almost unbearable. He had them by the scruffs of their necks, and they couldn't get away. The entire gallery of witnesses was breathing as one person, in together and out together.

It might have been an inadvertent stage-wait, but it strengthened rather than weakened his hold on them. It screwed them into such a pitch of tension, that no uninterrupted flow of events could have achieved for him.

Far off in the background, ever-present and unnoticed, there were town noises. Traffic-noises. A grating squeak from some vehicle making a laborious turn.

His head slashed down in signal. "Release X—the unsubpoenaed witness," he directed.

The deputy left the window, crossed—perhaps to a room-door, perhaps to a closet—returned again. He kept looking steadily and intently over his shoulder.

"Describe," said Ford in a faltering voice.

Silence.

"Haven't you anything to say?" He was shaking all over. You could see him shaking when the sun met the shade on his person; the boundary-lines flickered.

"Mrs. Gordon's little dog is in the room with her now," the deputy reported. "He has come into the room, and he's nosing around—"

"The ways dogs do," said Ford expiringly. He must have been praying. His lips moved a little, but his jawline was tense.

Pause.

"The dog has found the spilled bullets, over in the corner. He's sniffing around among them."

Pause.

"He picks up one between his teeth, and suddenly scampers out of the room with it. I think he's running down the stairs; I can hear the paw-pats on the woodwork."

Ford's face was shiny. Not from triumph but from excruciation. His breathing was moribund. "The front door was closed that day—so it must be closed today too. Even a woman about to quit a house for the last time doesn't leave her door ajar beforehand. But watch the ground-floor windows on this side; there was one up a little from the bottom that day—just as it's up a little from the bottom now."

He flattened himself unobtrusively against the side of the opposite house, the Laughtons' and waited, hands crushed behind him. A bell clanged somewhere a block away, but that had nothing to do with this.

Suddenly a blurred little brown shape came rocketing out of the narrow bottom gap in the ground-floor window, landed with a bounce on the turf in a mischievous frenzy of haste. They all recognized Janet Gordon's little terrier Brownie, frantic with animal play. It was holding something in its mouth, something which it put down, guarded with its forepaws, picked up again. Something which it wanted someone to try to take away from it.

"Kindly don't call to the dog or distract it in any way," Ford warned in a guarded voice from offside. "Allow it to follow its own inclinations unhindered."

That bell clanged again, a little nearer than before. The dog's ears quirked to it, it picked up its plaything and scampered up the grassy slope and out onto the street beyond. There it stopped short, dipped its muzzle, unburdened itself of something, stood guard over the spot for a moment, tail-stump twitching challengingly.

Its mistress's voice sounded from above, within

the house. "Brownie, where are you? Here, Brown!" And then a chirping little whistle, that its devotion must have found irresistible.

It rushed headlong down the slope, leaped for the same sill that had just now disgorged it, made it up with a precarious skittering of paws on woodwork, and disappeared into the house. Its role was over.

Ford flicked a finger instructively up toward the deputy-narrator.

"Mrs. Gordon has now fastened a leash to the dog's collar, and looped the other end of that around the handle of one of the valises. Her preparations for leaving are now complete." He kept watching over-shoulder. "She has taken a cigarette out. She is holding it."

Ford looked at his watch. He nodded imperceptibly. The deputy's own head echoed the nod.

"She's lit the cigarette, and is smoking it."

Ford's wrist was still hooked under his chin.

"There will be a short wait," he said, "of not more than one and a half minutes." His face was white and puckered tight over its bone-structure. Every time he breathed it was the hollows of his cheeks that pulsed and not his chest. And he breathed too often and too laboredly. Every line of his body betokened acute, haggard strain.

The minute and a half became two, became two and a half.

The onlookers became restive, fidgetted. There was a great deal of individual watch-consulting. They looked at him, mostly. Then they broke the monotony by looking up at the window, at the intercommunicating deputy, silenced now, still present at it. Neither place gave them the answer.

"For God's sake—!" he exploded in sudden agony, and seemed about to bend over double at the middle, then forced himself upright again, but sodden, against the clapboards of the Laughton house.

A little puff of dust came rolling along the street. A little curlicue no more, in advance of oncoming motion. Then a trolley, impertinent to this terrible, protracted pantomime, came humming along the single-track line (that was used in both directions), coming up from downtown, coming up from the right. This, which obviously had nothing to do with the proceedings at hand, but was just an unavoidable part of the background-scene, was scarcely noted. They passed about twice on the hour, once each way.

It came on, elongating, pulling out like a concertina, as it consumed perspective, glided abreast. The windows blazed one by one, as a certain ray of the sun smote them consecutively. And then went out again as they passed the combustion-point.

Ford's face was almost a skull under the thinnest veneer of elastically-expanded skin. He was so visibly shaking he had to steady his watch-hand with his other, now.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he begged them hoarsely, "please don't watch *me,* please don't keep staring at me. *Watch that trolley-car instead!*"

Every head turned as one. Like the gallery at a tennis-match, as the ball goes sailing by from right to left. His didn't. He just looked down intently at the ground. Like when you're listening. Listening for something you can't hear yet, but want to. Or maybe you pray that way too. Why not? God can hear prayers from a bowed head as well as an upraised one. If He wants to.

It was broadside now, the trolley. For only an exact moment. And then it started to slip off center once more. To the far side, this time, to the left.

The first wheel-truck was past now, was altogether offside. The rear end began to clear the space. The women opposite and the jury came into untrammelled view of one another once more.

If he had been praying, he wasn't praying now any more. He swallowed heavily. Like when you swallow your own heart. His limbs sagged, as though they were about to let him down to the ground.

The second wheel truck—

Then suddenly a whip cracked. Only there wasn't any whip there. Or a car backfired. Only there wasn't any car in sight.

The fibre-boards rearward to the jurors snapped angrily. As if a hard-shelled bee in full flight had inadvertently rammed into them.

Over-extended nerves recoiled with a jar. They all jumped in unison, even the dignified judge in his center-position arm-chair.

He raised his head, Peter Ford, and pointed upward with it, instead of with his finger or his hand. They looked. Janet Gordon was in the window, leaning forward intently, as she had been that first day. Hidden hands bracketed to the inside of the sill below her. A creeper of thin blue smoke was plainly visible in the sunlight, coming upward along the frame, then turning out, and from there unraveling on its own.

The woman opposite pointed, as the whole world had pointed that day; then remembering, slapped her own bony, accusing finger down with her other hand.

"Deputy," Ford said softly.

The deputy reached down, took Janet's wrist, raised her hand and thrust it out into the sun. As though he were bathing it in the sunlight. The fingers were white and slim. The cigarette between them was whiter and slimmer still.

Ford took his handkerchief away from his forehead, scissored his arms like a motion-picture director ending a scene. "That's all, ladies and gentlemen. That's as it happened, that's as it was. That's my summation." He pointed to an empty window, open, ground-floor in the Laughton house; eloquent, more eloquent than the one Janet had been in just now, because it was so empty.

"Bob Laughton is dangling out of there, with a bullet lodged in his head. Shot dead by—*Streetcar Number 1109.*"

A muffled gale of controversial comment, both pro and con, had swept over the onlookers. Voices were raised in excitement and dispute, "Maybe it coulda happened that way, at that, but he ain't showed us no *proof* it did!"

Ford stepped closer to judge and jury. "Haven't I?" he said. "Then let me show you some now!" He dropped the interfolded handkerchief he had been holding like a pad to the side of his face and an angry seam traced across his cheek, began to ooze with unchecked blood.

A woman screamed at the sight. A woman who was a talesman. A very good woman to have scream, if anyone had to.

"I was lucky," he said hotly, thrusting his face forward. "Luckier than Laughton. It just creased me, but it went into him. If you'll examine that plyboard behind you, I think you'll find it pierced it somewhere or other. I could have used a blank for this reenactment, but I knew that would never convince you, so I used a live one instead.

"I had enough confidence in my client's innocence, to risk my own life if I had to—to prove it to you!"

His knees gave a dip, and a pair of the court-attendants quickly came forward and supported him between them.

"Only, now that it's over," he mumbled apologetically, "I'm afraid I'm not very brave. You see, I'm not a soldier, I'm just a lawyer, fighting for the truth."

They were visibly impressed. The tide had turned completely in his favor.

"Want a recess, son?" the judged asked benevolently.

"No." He shrugged off the attendants, straightened himself, adjusted his coat. Looked proud, looked young again, twenty-four again, in love again; looking toward the window, the other one where she was, eyes brimming in the sunlight. "There is only one thing more to say, just—the defense rests its case."

## 22.

The New York train gleefully trilled its approach from off somewhere over the landscape. This was the train for town, the train for home, the freedom train. This was the train that was both a beginning and an end.

They stood up together from the suitcase upon which they had been sitting at the edge of the platform. Janet's face was drawn and pale, and she tightened her hand around his arm. She sighed then, and ten years seems to melt away on the soft sound.

"Here it comes," she said.

The train came in swiftly, large in its black length. Like a barrier it stood, holding back the past.

"Yes, here it comes," he said. "Ours. Our train. Together from now on."

She turned and looked up into his face fervently. "Oh, Peter, it was all so wonderful—"

He smiled down at her, loving her. "Yes, wasn't it?" he said slyly.

"But, Peter, to risk your life for me that way—! To gamble and to win out—!"

"My darling!" he said whimsically, with a little laugh, tightening an arm about her waist.

His smile was broader now. "You're going to be a lawyer's wife now, so there are things you should know about the trade. It's a form of showmanship, you know, as much as yours used to be."

He made a little gesture with his free hand. "That bullet couldn't be counted on to go where it could be seen; it had to be helped a little. It could have gone up into thin air. It could have gone the other way, away from us. It could have done any number of terrible things. Worst of all, it could have hit one of the jurors or the judge. So I used a blank, as the only safe way. Of course—"

"But it nicked you!"

He touched the strip of court-plaster decorating his cheek. His grin now was sheepish and a bit proud. "A pocket nail file did that, under the cover of my handkerchief.

"The bullet hole, of course, was carefully fired through that plyboard well ahead of time, then plugged up with wet sawdust and mud. It was knocked out by a blow from a hammer at the appropriate time, with the assistance of someone who felt he could use a ten-dollar bill."

"Peter!" she gasped. "Then you don't *know* it happened that way, not for sure—? You were just . . . just making it all up?"

## 23.

"I knew one thing, and one thing alone. That was all I had to start with: that you didn't do it. I knew you, all about you. I knew you weren't capable of it. So this is the way that it *must* have happened, what other way is there, could there be?"

Peter knew, of course; after all, he loved her. He explained: "The day I took Brownie back from that woman, a little neighbor-boy came along the street with a bag of walnuts that were too tough for him to crack. I saw him give one to Brownie, and Brownie ran and laid it on the car-track; and they both waited for the car to come along and do the work for them.

"I knew then. It was an old game with those two. And as I watched, I knew I'd saved you. But just to make sure Brownie would come in on cue, that cartridge-shell we used yesterday afternoon

was salved a bit with—peanut butter. Just covering the angles, of course, to be sure of a fine performance."

"Peter!" she said again, widening her eyes deprecatingly.

"Showmanship," he said with a laugh. Her eyes said she wanted to be kissed then, but he went on:

"I knew you didn't do it, and I knew that was the way it must have happened. But *knowing* a thing is one thing. Proving it in law is something else again. They're never the same. I had to point it up for them the best I could. I had to *dramatize* it so that they could see it and *know*. I couldn't just recite it in a musty courtroom.

"What's that old saying? The end justifies the means. It's old and perhaps trite, but it's right. The things that people see with their own eyes, they believe. The things you tell them, they don't always. So I was justified." He tightened his hold on her waist.

Her skirts were dancing in the by-rush of the train; her eyes were dancing now, too, and so must her heart have been to make them sparkle so. She nestled her face for a moment against his shoulder, as he helped her up the platform steps.

"There's a light, above a stagedoor, back on Forty-first Street," he breathed tenderly, "that used to shine down on two kids and their dreams. Maybe it's dusty now, maybe it's dark; but I want to stand there under it again just once the way I used to. I want to look up and say 'What's a minute? What's an hour? What's ten years?' "

"There's a light above a stagedoor, back on Forty-first Street—" she repeated raptly.

# ARREST

*He stood there, staring at himself in the mirror. Then he put his gun to his head . . .*

by

**DONALD E. WESTLAKE**

WILLIAM WINTHROP turned the key in its lock, pushed open the apartment door and stepped inside. Kicking the door shut behind him, he stopped in the foyer and looked at the key in the palm of his hand. He grinned to himself and slowly turned the hand palm downward. The key made no sound at all as it hit the carpet.

Winthrop moved from the foyer to the living room, leaving hat and tie on a sofa as he went by. He walked into the bedroom, tossing his coat and shirt at a chair in the corner of the room as he removed them. Then he sat down on the edge of the bed and put his head in his hands.

He could feel his hands trembling against his cheeks, and was surprised. He felt his chest for his cigarettes, realized he didn't have his shirt on, and walked over to where the shirt lay, on the floor beside the chair. He picked it up, took the cigarettes from the pocket, and dropped it on the floor again. Removing one cigarette, he dropped the pack on the floor beside the shirt, then lit the cigarette with his pocket lighter. He looked at the lighter for a long moment, then dropped that, too.

He stuck the cigarette into the corner of his mouth, walked over to the dresser on the other side of the room, and opened the top drawer. He felt under a pile of shirts, came up with a .45 auto-

matic. The gun dangling from his hand, he went back and sat down on the bed again. He dropped the cigarette on the floor and stepped on it.

He took the clip from the handle of the gun, looked at the eight bullets, then put the clip back. He pressed the barrel of the gun against the side of his head, just above the ear, and sat there, his finger trembling on the trigger. Perspiration broke out on his forehead. He stared at the floor.

Finally, he looked up from the floor and saw his own reflection in the mirror on the closet door. He saw a young man of twenty four, long brown hair awry, face contorted, dressed in brown pants, brown shoes and a sweaty undershirt, a gun held to his head.

He hurled the gun at the mirror. The crash startled him and he jumped. Then he lay face down on the bed, his head in the crook of his left arm, his right fist pounding the bed. "Damn it," he cried, over and over, in time to the pounding of his fist. "Damn it, damn it, damn it."

At last, he stopped swearing and beating the bed, and a sob shook his body. He cried, wrackingly, for almost five minutes, then rolled over and stared at the ceiling, breathing hard.

When he had calmed down, he rolled out of the bed to his feet and walked across the room to where his cigarettes lay. This time, after he'd lit the cigarette, he stuffed cigarettes and lighter in his pants pocket, then recrossed the room, past the bed and the dresser and the shattered mirror and the gun on the floor, and on into the bathroom.

With water filling the sink, he took a comb and ran it through his hair, to get it out of the way while he washed. Then he turned the tap off, dipped a washcloth in the water, and scrubbed his face until it hurt. Grabbing a towel, he dried face and hands, and looked at himself in the mirror. Again he took the comb, this time combing more carefully, patting his hair here and there until it looked right to him.

The cigarette had gone out in the ashtray, so he lit another. Then he went back to the bedroom.

Kicking the gun and the larger pieces of glass out of the way, he opened the closet door and looked over the clothing inside. He selected a dark blue suit, shut the closet door, and tossed the suit on the bed.

Back at the dresser, he took out a clean shirt, underwear and socks. From the tie rack on the back of the bedroom door he took a conservative gray number and brought all back to the bed.

He changed rapidly, transferring everything from the pockets of the pants he'd been wearing to the suit. Then he went back to the living room and made himself a drink at the bar in the corner. He gulped the drink, lit another cigarette and went to the front door, to make sure it was unlocked. On the way back, he picked up his key and put it in his pocket.

He sat down, crossed and recrossed his legs, buttoned and unbuttoned his suit coat, played with the empty glass. After a minute, he crushed the cigarette in an ashtray, got up, and made another drink. He swallowed half, lit another cigarette, threw away the empty pack and went to his room for another. When he came back, he reached for the half-full glass on the bar, but his hand shook and the glass went over, shattering on the floor behind the bar. He jumped again.

Leaning back against the wall, eyes squeezed shut, he whispered to himself, "Take it easy. Take it easy. Take it easy."

After a while, he moved away from the wall. He'd dropped the cigarette when the glass broke, and it was still smoldering on the rug. He stepped on it and took out another. He got another glass and made a drink, then went back to the sofa and sat down again.

He was just finishing the drink when the knock came. He was facing the door. "Come in," he called.

The door opened, and the two of them came in through the foyer to the living room. "William Winthrop?" asked one.

Winthrop nodded.

The man took out his wallet, flipped it open to show a badge. "Police," he said.

"I know," said Winthrop. He got to his feet. "Anything I say can be used against me. I demand my right to make one phone call."

"To your lawyer," said the detective. It wasn't a question.

"Of course," said Winthrop. He crossed to the phone. "Care for a drink? The makings are over there, in the corner."

"No thanks," said the detective. He motioned and the other one walked into the bedroom.

"Don't mind the mess in there," called Winthrop. "I tried to commit suicide."

The detective raised his eyebrows and walked over to the bedroom door to take a look. He whistled. "What happened to the mirror?"

"I threw the gun at it."

"Oh." The detective came back. "At least you're sane. A lot of guys try to cash in. Only the nuts do."

"That's a relief," said Winthrop. He dialed.

The detective grunted and sat down. The other one came back from his inspection, shook his head, and sat down near the door.

Winthrop heard the click as a receiver was lifted, and a man's voice said, "Arthur Moresby, attorney."

"Hello, Art? This is Bill."

There was a pause, then, "Who?"

"Bill. Bill Winthrop."

"I'm afraid I don't recognize the name. Are you sure you have the right number?"

"Oh," said Winthrop. "Like that. It's in the papers already, eh?"

"On the radio."

"You don't know me, is that right?"

"That's right," said Arthur Moresby, attorney. "Goodbye."

Winthrop heard the click, but continued to hold the phone against his ear.

"What's the matter?" asked the detective.

Winthrop shook his head and returned the phone to its cradle. He grinned crookedly at the detective. "Wrong number," he said.

"How a wrong number?"

"I'm a sinking ship."

"And your lawyer?"

"He's a rat. He doesn't know me. He never heard the name."

"Oh," said the detective. He stood up. "I guess we can go then, huh?"

Winthrop shrugged. "I guess so."

He followed them out of the apartment. They walked to the elevator, Winthrop pushed the button, and they waited without speaking. When the elevator came, they stepped in and the detective pushed the button marked '1'.

On the way down, the detective said, "Mind if I ask you a question?"

"For the insurance," said Winthrop. "I was in debt. Either I paid or chhhhk." He ran a finger across his neck.

"That isn't the question. I want to know why you waited for us to come before you called the lawyer. You had a lot of time before we got there. Why did you wait?"

Winthrop stared at the door. Why had he waited? He thought a minute, then said, "I don't know. Bravado or something."

"Okay," said the detective. The door slid open and they walked across the vestibule to the street. A few passersby watched curiously as Winthrop got into the back seat of the police car.

"I'm twenty four," said Winthrop, as they drove through the streets to Police Headquarters.

"So?" said the detective.

"Seems like a hell of an age to stop at."

"How old was your mother?" asked the cop.

Winthrop closed his eyes. "Do you hate me?"

"No," said the cop.

Winthrop turned and looked at the cop. "I do," he said.

"I hate my guts."

## *Berserk Bullets*

In Mexicali, Mexico, a Chinese resident got mad one night and fired his pistol several times. Two other Chinese were wounded. One bullet ignited a box of powder used in making firecrackers. The fire that followed destroyed a maze of 150 rooms, in the ruins of which a body was found.

The fire spread to a warehouse and grocery store. When the flames threatened a saloon, spectators rushed in and carried out all the bottles in sight. Meanwhile, firemen arrived at the scene, but discovered that a repair crew had cut off the water supply.

Police identified the trigger happy man who started it all as Lou Son Lon. He got away.

## *Miracle Men*

It really happened in Tulsa, Okla. A man named Joshua appeared before the judge in city court charged with operating a whiskey still. "Are you the Joshua who made the sun stand still?" the judge asked.

"No, your honor," the prisoner replied. "I'm the Joshua that made the moonshine."

## *Convincing Evidence*

Floyd Russell, 39, Oklahoma City, refused to believe that Policewoman Jean Latham was an officer. He insisted she was a member of the Waves. "If you're a cop, arrest me," he challenged.

She did. Pinned against a wall before he could dodge, Russell was booked on a public intoxication charge.

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